57
January-April 2003
SPAINGOURMETOUR

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Food, Wine & Travel Magazine

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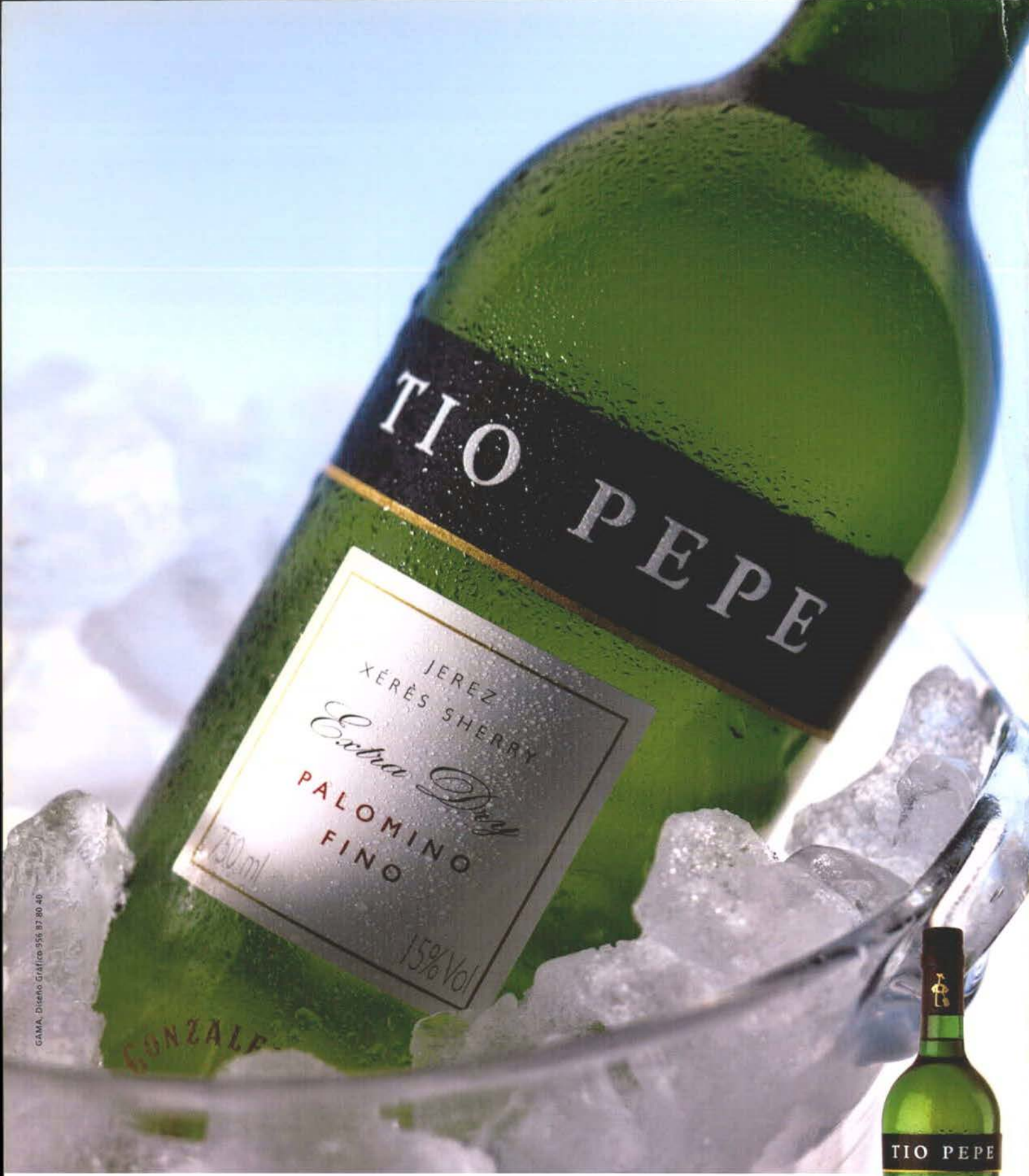
January-April 2003

On the Farmhouse Trail in Liébana

elBullihotel Marvelous Marathon

Celebration of Food

Keeping Wine in the Family: Tradition and Innovation



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[TIO PEPE: WE'VE CHANGED THE BODY BUT NOT THE SOUL]

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What do coal and beef have in common?

Nothing, except that deep in the mountains of León, the mines that closed down in the 1980s have been replaced by extensive cattle farming giving the most superb beef. This is thanks to the love of the Álvarez family for their homeland. Owners of the legendary Vega Sicilia winery, amongst others, they have devoted every effort to this ambitious project. Love of their country has also encouraged the cheese producers of Liébana in Cantabria to join forces. Their cheeses are worthy partners for the wines produced by traditional families, many of which are introducing innovations in the various wine-producing regions of Spain.

If you haven't yet booked a New Year celebration ... for next year ... we suggest Andalusia with a selection of gastronomic delights bearing the signature of Ferran Adrià and all against an enticing background. Meanwhile, allow us to transport you to the highest summits of the Iberian Peninsula, Pakistan or Greenland in an interview with our last 21st-century Quixote, this time an inspiring geographer.

Our more down-to-earth trip round the shops specializing in Spanish products draws to a close but we are continuing the festivities with, amongst others, a paella competition.

And, this year, **two important news items.** *Spain Gourmetour* is at last to be published in Spanish, for distribution in all the countries of Latin America, and the English, French and German editions will, from now on, be adopting a new publication date.

Secondly, *Spain Gourmetour* is soon to be on the Internet. More details in the next issue.

Until then, the whole team wishes you all the very best for 2003.

Cathy Boirac
Editor-in-chief

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SPAIN GOURMETOUR JANUARY-APRIL 2003 No.57

Andalucia, the Splendour of Spain

Andalucía, the colorful, vibrant region of southern Spain, steals the hearts of all who come to know her. Andalusians revel in their way of life and their cuisine, based on fruits, vegetables, seafood, olive oil, garlic and grains, all a part of the Mediterranean diet that is celebrated worldwide for its appealing flavors and inordinately healthy ingredients. Andalusian wines of distinction —such as the exquisite sherry and brandy from Jerez and Montilla and other notable wines from Málaga and Huelva— create the perfect complement to this or any other cuisine. Andalucía is a cornucopia of riches from both land and sea and never-ending source of culinary excitement. Discover Andalucía, the splendour of Spain.

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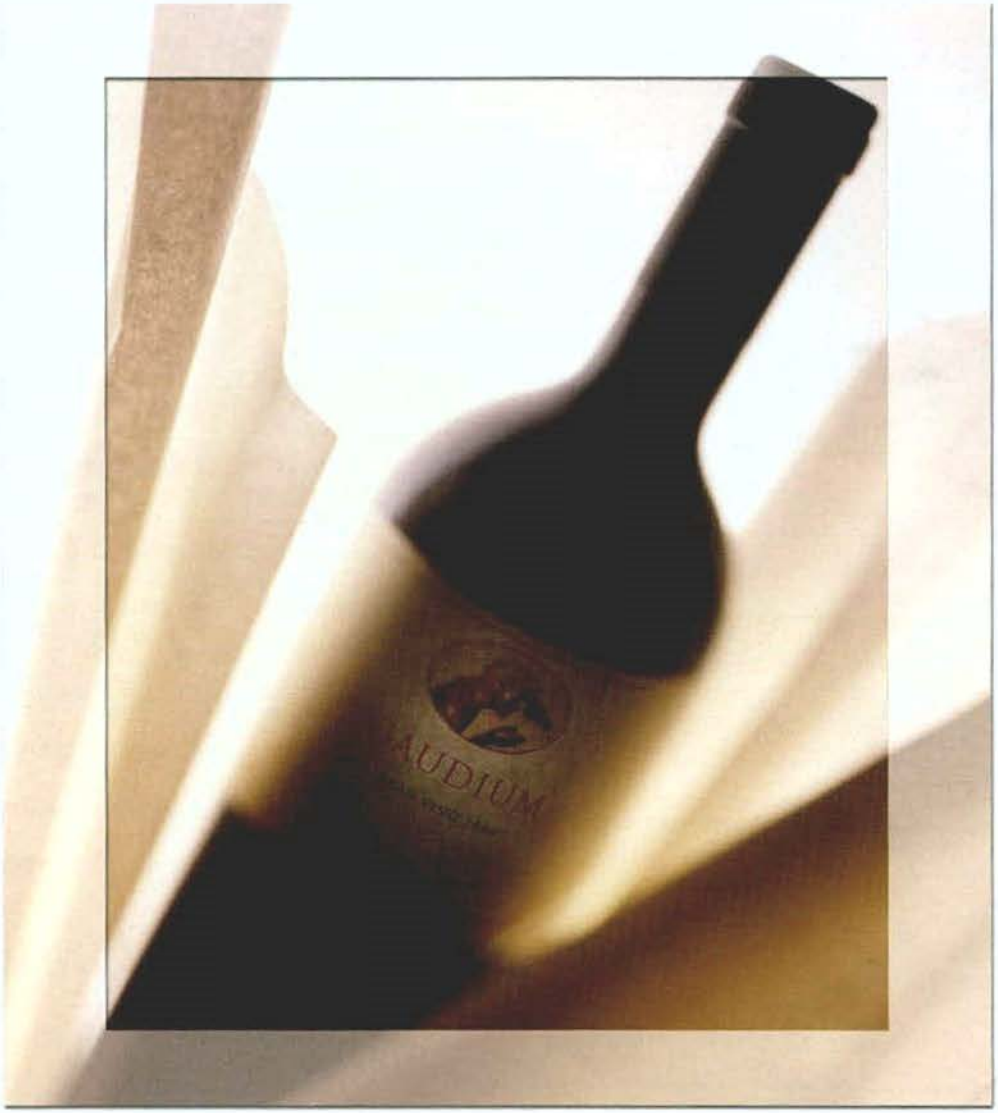

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SUITE

This third and last part of our gourmet symphony takes us to the United Kingdom, Austria, Australia and Belgium. Whether it be due to pleasant holiday memories on the part of the British, historical connections to Spain shared by Belgians and Austrians, or an adventurous culinary curiosity for our Antipodes, Spanish delicacies are met with great interest everywhere. Delicatessen items such as *piquillo* peppers, *Ibérico* ham, and olive oils from the various regions of the country, as well as traditional products–countless types of cheese or sausage specialties, honey, chocolate and much more–inspire enthusiasm far and wide, making gourmets into true aficionados.

TEXT
FIONA BECKETT

Absolutely Fabulous in Great Britain

Given how popular Spain is as a holiday destination for the British it might seem surprising that Spanish food is not better known. True, we all know about *paella* (but not necessarily the Calasparra rice you need to make it) and most people have heard of *tapas* and *chorizo* but until recently that was as far as it went.

There are cultural differences that help to explain this. Ham, for example, is traditionally cooked rather than dried in the U.K. so we don't have the same taste in ham. Canned and bottled goods are regarded as second best by the average British consumer so products such as high grade tuna and jars of top quality beans meet with some resistance. And our tastes are also different when it comes to sweet things. There's no tradition of eating nougat, for instance, so *turrón* is an unfamiliar product. But most importantly there are hardly any Spanish restaurants to give people a taste of authentic Spanish food. All this is rapidly changing as adventurous travelers begin to explore more of Spain than the coasts and more Modern British chefs begin to bring Spanish influences into their menus. High profile London chefs such as Sam Clark of Moro, Peter Gordon of Providores and Martin Lam of Ransome's Dock who have become excited about Spanish ingredients are helping to put them on the culinary map. And once they discover their quality, London's "foodies"–as followers of quality ingredients are known here–are keen to seek them out.

Selfridges

One shop where they can find a big selection is Selfridges on Oxford Street, a traditional department store which has undergone a radical makeover in the last couple of years to become one of the best shopping destinations in London. This is true of the bustling food hall which almost seems like one giant world food supermarket when you descend on it at lunchtime.

As you walk through the door you immediately come to a counter with one of the best selections of Spanish ham and charcuterie in London of which fresh food buyer Tanya McMullen is immensely proud. "There's some really amazing produce coming out of Spain and we're trying to improve the quality all the time. For instance we've recently changed our *Serrano* to one from the Teruel denomination, the only Serrano to have a D.O. The hams are cured for 12 months at an altitude of over 800 meters (2,624 feet). The higher the altitude the cooler the air which allows for a slow maturing process and a greater depth of flavor." They also of course have the famous Ibérico ham, from the Carrasco family as well as *lomo*, *salchichón* and chorizo from the same acorn-fed pigs and the famous salchichón de Vich which has been produced by Riera Ordeix. Selfridges is also building up its range of Spanish cheeses, concentrating on small artisanal producers. "Customers are aware of Manchego but we're slowly introducing them to other cheeses like this fantastic Monte Enebro and Picos blue which is matured in mountain caves then wrapped in maple leaves."

There's good representation of Spanish products on the grocery shelves, too. Emma Woodford, who buys for the section, is particularly excited by the tinned fish she gets, especially the range from Ramon Peña. "The great thing about the product is the quality of the fish they catch, which makes them just as good as fresh fish. I really think they are one of life's little luxuries." She believes it's only a matter of time before consumers get used to unfamiliar products like some Spanish types of beans. "The

great thing about having glass jars is that you can see the sheer quality of the ingredients."
We move through the shelves with Emma enthusing about each product–olive oils ("they're so fruity you can almost taste the sun in them"), saffron ("fabulous for gifts") *frita-da de tomate del Bierzo* ("a great base for gazpacho. Useful for us Brits because we can't get ripe enough tomatoes").
"Everything we buy gets tasted, you know, so that we're sure we're selling the best. We've got everything you need to create an authentic Spanish meal."

Harvey Nichols

Moving a couple of kilometers across London to the other side of the West End you find Harvey Nichols, the upmarket Knightsbridge store immortalized by the popular sitcom "Absolutely Fabulous" as the permanent shopping haunt of the feckless Patsy. Modern Spanish products seem to fit naturally into the superbly designed Food Market up on the 5th floor–stacks of brightly colored Ortiz tinned fish, brilliant red jars of piquillo peppers and stylish chocolates from leading chocolatier Enric Rovira

who the store was the first to introduce to London. "This has been the big turning point for Spanish food," says buyer Mark Lewis. "Spain has always had amazing food products but in the past there wasn't enough awareness about how to market them. Rovira is a case in point. He really is one of the best chocolate makers in the world but it's the design that really pulls you in. We've been working with him for four years now and have an exclusive deal on his easter eggs in the U.K."
Lewis is also very enthusiastic about the Ines Rosales, marvelous sweet-savory olive oil biscuits flavored with aniseed. I love the way they're all individually wrapped and the taste is fabulous. He's also taken on rustic pottery jars of an intensely aromatic honey, the *mel de montanya* which he presses me to try ("you won't believe the taste, it's unbelievable") and some fine, delicately honeyed turrón from Alemany which is among the best I've tasted.
The Food Market has the advantage of a fine dining restaurant and cafe on the same floor which can showcase some of their products. "One of our chefs Henry Harris was mad about these baby black beans, the Tormesina *frijol negro* from Sierra de Gredos," says Lewis, pointing to a packet. "He used them a lot."
The department also stocks Ibérico ham and cheeses as well as *membrillo* and a fig and almond wheel which is prominently displayed on top of the cheese counter. And there is an excellent wine department, just off the foodhall which showcases some top Spanish wines. Lewis believes it's simply a matter of getting his customers to try Spanish products to convert them. "The thing is that Spain not only has great produce but it's good value for money."

Fiona Beckett *is a food and wine writer who writes for a number of national newspapers and specialist food and drink magazines. She was nominated Food Journalist of the Year this year by the Guild of Food Writers.*

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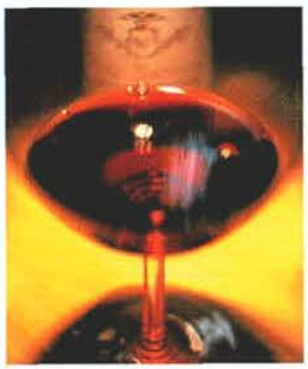
There are also food markets in the Leeds, Birmingham and Edinburgh stores.

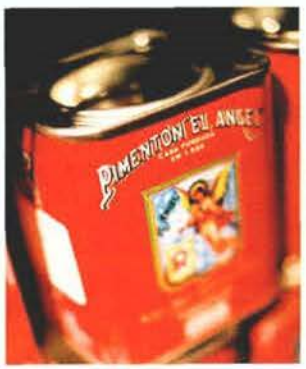
TEXT
MICHAEL PRÓNAY

TRANSLATION
SYNONYME

The Moor Speaks Spanish in Austria

Spanish cuisine is one of the most interesting and exciting in all of Europe. Unfortunately, *Herr und Frau* Austria do not seem to know that (yet). This situation, in which great progress has nonetheless been made over the last few years, can be attributed primarily to history. The time shared together under the Spanish Hapsburgs was too short, and while Spain looked westward toward its colonies on the other side of the Atlantic, Austria was busy with Hungary and Bohemia in *Mitteleuropa*, and with the Balkans.





Meinl am Graben

Tuscany, Venice and Trieste are all much closer to the Austrian heart, to say nothing of having at one time or another been part of the Austrian sphere of power (Trieste for some 700 years), which explains why Italian cooking is so well known and loved in Austrian territories.
This also accounts for why Austria remains relatively unacquainted with much of Spanish cooking and produce. In addition, rigorous trade barriers against meat and dairy products blocked imports of Ibérico ham, Manchego and other products well into the 1990s. It is only when Austria entered the E.U. that a change in mentalities began, and has continued until today.
The leading delicatessen in Vienna is called Meinl am Graben. The Moor in the title of this article is a reference to the logo of the business, founded in 1862 as a coffee shop. The logo portrays the dark head of a child with a tall red fez, combining the traditions of the Turkish sultanate and Arabia with those of the baroque angel familiar to central European architecture. It was created to highlight the emphasis on excellent coffee.
Store manager Michaela Brandl's eyes sparkle when she talks about sales of Spanish products. "It is unbelievable how Spain has gained ground. In less than three years, sales of Spanish specialties have risen fivefold." Whereas the assortment previously included only pimientos del piquillo (sweet red Spanish peppers), chorizo (spicy sausage), sherry vinegar and one type of olive oil, today the list of Spanish specialties available at Meinl comprises well over one hundred products. "Before, people could travel to Italy easily, but now, much more distant destinations can be reached without a problem. And of course, people want to be able to buy here in Vienna the products they discovered in Spain."
The selection of Spanish olives is incredibly large, and the same applies to cheeses. According to Michaela Brandl, "Manchego and Tetilla are now standard products and our customers would simply not understand if they ceased to be available. It has come to the point that people now come in to ask what new products we have from Spain." And the answer is, a lot. Spanish chocolate (would you have guessed?) is a steady competitor, the *bonito del norte* preserves–the best tuna fish available anywhere–leave cheaper grades light-years behind, and even in the field of spices, Spain has contributed a few newcomers (caraway). There is also turrón, a type of Spanish nougat, and the fantastic ham specialties, Serrano and Ibérico.
"There are of course other reasons for the success of Spanish products, first of all Spanish wine, and secondly, the cooking," says Michaela Brandl. Wine, with Rioja leading the way, started to make a name for itself well before Spanish cuisine. Names like Marqués de Murrieta, Miguel Torres or Jean León have been familiar to wine connoisseurs since the 1980s.
In the wake of travel came the discovery that Spanish cooking has much more to offer than paella and tortillas. Tapas, the small appetizers that of themselves represent a lifestyle, are of particular importance and

constitute Spain's greatest contribution to world cooking. First, because they taste so good, and secondly, because they fit so well in our fast-moving society due to their small size and the total lack of constraints–you can pick and choose what you want in any order. Tapas can also be eaten standing in the street, which cannot really be said for a wiener schnitzel.

Could any further improvements be made? Michaela Brandl laughs. "Improvements can always be made, even though a great deal has already been done. For example, the presentation and packaging of certain products could be a bit less run of the mill. Italy is simply tops in that field. And if the logistics could speed up a bit, that would be great. When we need Parma or San-Daniele ham from Italy, it is on our shelves in one to two days. Ibérico ham takes 10 days to two weeks. There has got to be some room for improvement there."

But at Meinl am Graben, they will do wonders to supply the goods. A short while ago, I looked on as a customer in the well-stocked Meinl cellar requested a bottle of Vega Sicilia, Spain's most famous and legendary red wine. A great amount of hustle and bustle produced a meager result–there was none left. Less than two minutes later, Karl Seiser, the general manager of the business, arrived with a bottle that he presented to the amazed, and thankful, customer. He explained with a sly grin, "We have an excellent restaurant here and we are particularly proud of our wine cellar. It goes without saying that Vega Sicilia is on our wine menu and if there is a bottle on the premises, it is of course for sale." On that note, he turned and disappeared into the depths of the multi-story gourmet paradise.

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Michael Prônay *started to write about wine and cooking in 1981. His love for wine was enough to give up his job as a banker and spend two years, starting in 1984, as the chef-sommelier in the new Korso bei der Oper restaurant, which today boasts one Michelin star and four Gault-Millau toques. Since 1988, he has worked as a wine and cuisine journalist, first at* Falstaff-Magazin, *then since 1996 as an independent reporter. He is the wine editor for the Austrian magazine* À la Carte *and for* Vinaria.

Photo credits page 136

TEXT
CHRISTINE MANFIELD

A Spanish Seduction in Australia

Modern Australians embrace flavors and food practices of all the cultures that make up our population. We are most fortunate to be able to cook with a sense of freedom, with broad horizons and fresh eyes. Our culinary diversity defines what we have become. Australia is an exciting place to be when it comes to inventive food right now. From our best restaurants, to our cafes and bistros, to what is available at our local shops and markets, to what we prepare at home, as discerning diners we invite great food with open arms and an open mind. It is the culinary adventurers in Australia over the past 20 years that we have to thank for our current good fortune, those chefs and suppliers who had the vision, skill and determination to liberate our taste buds and nourish our minds and bodies with the better things in life.

Simon Johnson

One such supplier of premium food to Australians is the urbane Simon Johnson. A former chef who crossed the waters from New Zealand in the early eighties and saw the potential of sourcing the best products from Australia and abroad and setting up a network of supply, firstly to the restaurant trade and then to discerning domestic consumers through a series of his own retail stores and other food stores and emporiums. To wind back a decade, we began to see previously unheard of food treasures spilling onto the market. Simon first discovered the premium Spanish food products he now distributes through a trade show in the early nineties. It proved the perfect opportunity to expand his range from the Italian and French products we are all so familiar with. With assistance from the Spanish Commercial Office in Sydney, it became possible to source the products directly in Spain, build a working relationship with the producers and showcase them onto the Australian market. It also made economic sense as prices were greatly reduced by having direct contact. This came into fruition after Simon was a guest on one of the earlier gastronomic tours in Spain organized by the Foreign Trade Institute (ICEX), providing the impetus to meet the producers face to face, to gain a broad overview of what the country had to offer first hand, traveling from Madrid to Navarre to the Basque country and Catalonia to gain an insight first hand to the diversity and specifics of each food region. He found that the people he met had the same philosophy and tradition of excellence allowing a strong working relationship to develop. It was a mutually beneficial situation where the Spanish producers and marketing teams were able to build and strengthen their focus on their premium products more effectively, that what they had to offer stood alongside the best in the world, that what they had on offer was unique and of the high quality the world market was seeking. Our love affair with all things Spanish began in earnest when we started tasting the luscious olive oils specific to region and olive varietal like the Arbequina oils of Catalonia. Today there are many brands available to us, particularly fine examples of Spanish extra virgin olive oil include the Pons, Siurana, Barneo or Oleastrum brands. We have become familiar with the varietal olive oils (Hojiblanca, Picual, Cornicabra), they even appear on standard supermarket shelves. This is revolutionary for a country that hadn't really tasted olive oil 20 years ago. Then there's the roasted piquillo peppers, thick white asparagus and other vegetable preserves from Navarre, heavenly tuna and anchovy preparations all processed and packed by hand at the Ortiz factory near Bilbao, Calasparra rice from Murcia and proper flat pans for making authentic paella, the tiny salted capers and the La Chinata *pimentón* spice (a type of paprika from

Spain) in either sweet or smoky varieties. All these products speak with an integrity of flavor which is what attracted Simon Johnson to taking a keen interest in getting them onto the Australian market. Exciting Spanish farmhouse cheeses, sadly not the raw milk varieties, are now constant stars in our repertoire. We can now taste the wonderful Manchego in its various stages of maturation, smoky Idiazábal and occasionally the Cabrales, a pungent blue from Asturias or the bitey Valdeón. Quality is never compromised, mediocrity is not part of the language or the philosophy.

As with the usual practice in Australia of new culinary ideas filtering down from the leading kitchens in the country, so too did these Spanish products. As chefs incorporated them into their daily menus giving them renewed treatment, they began to sing their praises at various cooking schools like the Talk, Eat, Drink Series that Simon runs at his cooking school in Sydney and at various Masterclass workshops and demonstrations around the country. In 1996 Simon opened his retail and wholesale store in Melbourne giving the Melbourne audience direct access to all these new products. There was an opening in the market for a new range of tastes and flavors that was not imitating what other retailers were exhibiting. Educating the public on how to best use these products at cooking classes for the consumers and workshop tutorials for professionals, he was able to build the reputation and prove beyond doubt his faith in what he was supplying to the marketplace.

Simon also featured these new products in his quarterly catalogue giving the consumer direct access and acting as a catalyst for product recognition and appreciation. With the catalogue, the market also expanded to the Asian region through the professional network.

It has proven successful beyond measure, it has raised our understanding of quality, it has made us envious of all things Spanish, it has become a new frontier for us to travel with our taste buds.

***Christine Manfield** is a chef and food writer.*

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TEXT
MARC VANHELLEMONT

TRANSLATION
SYNONYME

Spain and Belgium: A Long-lived Connection

Belgians are used to traveling southward and eagerly discover the products and cuisine of the countries they visit, but Spain holds a very special emotional and cultural place in their hearts. Belgian cuisine has not waited, however, for recent tourist influences, having included Spanish products in its daily fare for many centuries.

Which self-respecting Belgian doesn't drink his daily ration of Spanish orange juice in winter? But, how many are aware of the Spanish origin of l'*escabeche* (marinated meat or fish), *bouillon de queue de boeuf au Xérès* (oxtail consommé with sherry), or *tête de veau en tortue* (calf's head "tortoise style", a Belgian specialty)...! Nonetheless, although Belgians place their trust in well-reputed Spanish foodstuffs, they don't generally expect the prices of certain Spanish imports, even in cases as warranted as Ibérico ham, which can be spectacularly high. An establishment such as Rob's, specializing in high-end products, can help in understanding products and prices; it stakes its reputation on it.

Rob

In Woluwé, located in northeast Brussels between downtown and the national airport, you'll find the green Rob sign announcing a "gourmet palace." Its doors open onto the most complete and highest quality assortment of food in the Belgian capital. Brussels natives have always known this sign to mean luxury and exotic fare, a place to indulge one's cravings or simply in which to practice the art of living. This store may look like a large supermarket at first, but that impression quickly fades as you step down the first aisle and discover its true mission: to satisfy the city's gourmets.

So, where is Spain in all this? Spain is all around. Amid the spices is saffron from La Mancha next to an assortment of sherry vinegars and a full north-south selection of olive oils from Catalonia to Andalusia. Amongst the tinned goods are the Albo products, with a full range of sardines, tuna, and assorted shellfish. Sherry reappears further on, but this time in the form of robust wines, from Manzanilla to Cream, from Vinícola Hidalgo y Cía. to Williams & Humbert through Lustau, John Harvey, González Byass, Osborne, Domecq and the like. A Toro Albala Montilla Moriles PX is there, lodged alongside its cousins. But the tour doesn't stop there!

Now onto aisles arranged to capture your attention. Midway down one shelf sits an Ibérico ham with its trademark throne, already well started, holding court over the Spanish Iberian pork sausages, chorizo, Serrano hams and lomo (cured pork loin). This is gourmet Spain to pique your envy and whet your appetite. For those unable to wait their turn, the self-service bar offers El Pozo charcuterie.

In the cheese section only Manchego represents the Iberian Peninsula. Lacking

neither space nor interest, however, Rob intends to stock both hard and soft Spanish cheeses when opportunities arise.
Less well known is the range of fish roe from the Pescaviar company, which paid a visit a short time ago to offer its assortment of all types of fish eggs including their herring Avruga, anchovy Anchoviar, and lobster Lobsviar that are arranged at the front end of the aisle. That exemplifies Rob's close attention to quality products.
Now you ask, where are the olives? They are in good company, at eye level along with a display of Barbateña culinary specialties: *choco de arte* (cuttlefish), *chipirones rellenos* (stuffed cuttlefish), *lomo de atún* (loin of tuna) ... just add the rice for the paella and some Ochoa wine, and all you need is a table and guests to embark upon a delicious repast.
A visit to the wine section is a must. Rob becomes a veritable wine cellar underground. The long, narrow room cloaked in dim light recreates the sensation of a winery. Spain, certainly not left out here, is found next to Italy. Just a few names at random: Enate, Ochoa, Barranc, Marqués de Riscal, Torres, well-known and less known wines stand side-by-side.
Spanish products rank fourth in sales at Rob. They enjoy a very good reputation in the eyes of both proprietors and customers.
The shop is seeking to increase its selection and prefers direct contact with producers. Importing directly allows them to ensure high quality over a stable range of products. This is not always easy, however. For example, Rob is now on the lookout for an orange producer able to supply him with small quantities of top-quality fruit. Rob, the select gourmet shop where Spanish food has its place.

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Photo credits page 136

Keeping It in the FAMILY

Tradition and Innovation

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Spanish wine is being transformed, and it's a family affair. Families whose roots run deep in their particular part of the country know more than anyone about that area's good and bad points. The most dynamic of them strive to consolidate the former and overcome the latter.

Famous names immediately evocative of great wines punctuate the history and geography of Spanish wine like milestones. The best known are probably the Jerez dynasties: González Byass, Hidalgo, Barbadillo, Osborne (two branches, two different wine companies), and Domecq (whose historic winery now forms part of multinational Allied Domecq). On a par with these are the big Catalan names: Torres, Raventós (owners of the Codorníu group), Ferrer (creators of Freixenet) and Suqué (part of the powerful Castillo de Perelada group). Then there are the Riojan families at the helm of such prestigious wineries as Bodegas Muga, Faustino Martínez, the multi-faceted Palacios Remondo (with branches in Priorato and Bierzo), Hurtado de Amézaga (creators of Marqués de Riscal) Aranzábal, and Ardanza (of the Rioja Alta winery). Not to mention the Chivite and Ochoa families in Navarre, the Gandía, Egli and Poveda families in Valencia, the López family in Málaga, the Solís and Ayuso families in La Mancha, and many, many more.

But other names, perhaps less famous, perhaps operating in lesser-known wine-growing areas, are also playing a vital role in configuring Spain's contemporary wine scene. These lower profile names have the added merit of being pioneers, often working with limited financial and technical resources or in the face of opposition from the sort of reactionary attitudes so often responsible for "traditions" and run-of-the-mill winemaking.
They are steering their areas of origin in new directions, selectively adopting new trends even when this means scrapping certain traditions. These families go back a long way in their home patch, and are motivated by a determination to improve their wines, in which regard they are an example to their neighbors. While gradually adjusting the sights of modest areas such as Montilla-Moriles, Almansa, Alicante and Yecla, they are also at the forefront of exciting innovations in important areas such as Rioja and Penedès, though, for obvious reasons, their impact there is less apparent, and longer-term.

People like Castaño, Alvear, Mendoza, Gramona, Martínez Bujanda or Bonete exist in all the dynamic wine-growing areas. While playing leading roles in bringing about these changes, they are also heavily involved in both the polemic and the prestige that have accrued to Spanish wine in recent years. These are the people who introduced new varieties, new winemaking systems, new types of wine ... in short, what might be called a whole new "winemaking philosophy." They are successors to the great revolutionaries of Spanish wine who, with varying degrees of commercial success, helped transform the character of their own area's wines, and even its landscape.

Front left to right: Juan Bosco de Alvear, Fernando de Alvear, Fernando Giménez de Alvear

Alvear: Spain's Oldest Winery

Few winemakers in Spain, or indeed anywhere in the world, can boast such a long family winemaking tradition as the Alvears of Montilla in Córdoba Province. Fewer still have such a long history of selling their wine bottled, which is why this bodega is often cited as Spain's oldest. Historically, the winery, vineyards and farming provided a second-string alternative to which the Alvears repaired after earlier careers in other activities, notably politics and the army, rather as, in ancient times, generals of the Roman Empire would retire to their agricultural estates in the Italian countryside. And much like Rome's old patrician families, there have been Alvears in the thick of many significant moments in the history of Spain and its former empire, later returning to their Cordoban domain to cultivate their vineyards.

The winery was founded in 1729 by Diego de Alvear y Escalera, son of a Burgos-born official of the Crown who was posted to Córdoba in the latter years of the 17th century. His son, Santiago, devoted himself completely to the vineyards and winery and opened up a market in England, traditional sherry territory. The next in dynastic line, Diego de Alvear y Ponce de León, an active soldier and politician, played a decisive role in the defense of Cádiz against Napoleon's troops, and held public posts in colonial Argentina before returning to Montilla. His son, Carlos de Alvear, remained in Argentina, where he was involved in the declaration of independence and was president of the constituent assembly.

In addition to their involvement in political life (Carlos de Alvear's grandson was president of the Republic of Argentina), the Argentinean branch of the family are also winegrowers. Back in Montilla, meanwhile, the Alvear winery has been a moving force in the evolution of D.O. Montilla-Moriles (see Glossary page 135). It pioneered the introduction of modern winemaking techniques, has updated certain traditional methods, and is experimenting with new approaches both in the vineyard (testing different grape varieties with a view to improving its young whites) and in the winery (exploring the potential of reds). Having been a field leader throughout its history, and now under the direction of Fernando Giménez de Alvear, this winery has moved boldly to give its wines a more modern image (notably, adopting the 37.5 cl bottle, more suitable for their type of wine which is served in smaller measures). The new look is just one sign of a far reaching renewal of their wine style. In such an historic firm producing singular wines, it has to be a slow process but the effects are starting to show.

Bodegas E. Mendoza: Modern Alicante

The Mendoza family has been in wine for just two generations, and only the second of these full-time. Even so, they are single-handedly changing the image of an area that is, for the most part, still very much anchored in the past.

Enrique Mendoza started growing vines and making wine as a weekend hobby, an enthusiastic amateur who spent his holidays visiting wine-growing areas all over the world. His sons, Pepe and Julián, are in the business of making wine professionally. Pepe is acknowledged to be the Valencian Community's most outstanding enologist and an important figure in modern Spanish winemaking as a whole. His red wines consistently incorporate cutting-edge techniques adapted to his area's specific characteristics, and he is also–daringly–updating the classic Muscatels of the Alicante coast.

The winery was founded in Alfàs del Pi, not far from the crowd-pulling tourist town of Benidorm on the Mediterranean coast, where supermarket owner Enrique Mendoza planted a few vines around 1970. His eldest son, Pepe, was born about then, too. He later helped out in the vineyard at weekends and at harvest-time fiestas with family and friends, organized by his father with the excuse of collecting the grapes. By the time he decided to go into making wine "seriously," Enrique Mendoza had realized that an area so near the coast was not ideal for growing reds. In 1989 he bought his property in Villena, in the inland Vinalopó valley, the classic production area for D.O. Alicante reds. He introduced French varieties Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, later adding Syrah (Shiraz), and built a winemaking bodega. The Alfàs del Pi vineyards, where the aging bodega is situated, have been given over to Muscatel. Bodegas E. Mendoza therefore straddles D.O. Alicante with a presence both on the coast and inland, and producing both sweet Muscatels and reds. They are not working with native variety Monastrell just yet, though Pepe is carrying out trials with the last two vintages. Fine-tuning the reds is an ongoing process, however, and to date has produced three real gems–a Syrah varietal, a *reserva* (see Glossary page 135) with Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah, and Reserva Santa Rosa, a blend of varieties–which rank among the top wines to come out of Mediterranean Spain. On the coastal side, the Muscatels are among the elite of Spain's most up-to-date sweet wines, combining sweetness with freshness and fruity elegance.

Front left to right:
Enrique, Pepe and
Julián Mendoza

Front left to right: Adolfo Pérez Jr., Benjamin Pérez, José Manuel Pérez, Adolfo Pérez Sr., Daniel Pérez

Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas: Progress in La Ribera

A grandfather who planted the old family vines, parents whose hard work established quality as their watchword, and sons who have contributed essential technical expertise: the Pérez Pascuas family story encapsulates that of Ribera del Duero. The last three generations of Pérez Pascuas are a living example of the path followed by the wines of D.O. Ribera del Duero in the last few decades. Don Mauro Pérez inherited a family tradition of growing vines. His sons, Benjamín, Manuel and Adolfo, built the bodega and created wines whose characteristic stamp of quality reflected their father's approach to his vineyards. His grandsons, especially enologist José Manuel, but with the increasing gradual involvement of the younger ones, now actually make wine–a process formerly left to enological advisors from outside the family. Enhancing the bodega's prestige is now up to them.

Mauro Pérez is an inspirational figure for the rest of the family. His unflagging enthusiasm for viniculture kept the old *majuelos* (as the old vineyards are known locally) going during the tough years, a period when his 35 hectares (86.5 acres) of vineyard made him the biggest vineyard owner in the little town of Pedrosa de Duero, in the Burgos Province. These vines would provide the basis for winemaking, which began in 1980 in modest traditional premises which were soon expanded. Just a few years later, in 1990, the winery moved to the present premises, which are still growing both in productivity and outward appearance, reflecting the expansion of the family vineyards of which there are now over 100 hectares (247 acres), all in Pedrosa.
Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas is one of the founding wineries of the Ribera del Duero D.O. and has participated in the various phases of development that the D.O.'s wines have gone through. Early on, it aimed at imitating the commercial pattern set by Rioja: red wines low on color considering the area's potential, and long cask aging. From the '89 vintage on, when the young José Manuel Pérez Ovejas, son of Benjamín, took over winemaking, the wines gained "weight" and personality, with that little hint of rusticity that characterized the Riberas of the period. From the '94 and '95 vintages on, they became more refined, acquiring much more elegance as José Manuel acquired greater enological know-how. The push for quality has never ceased, and today this family winery is, quite rightly, among the most prestigious both in its region and in Spain as a whole.

WEB SITES

www.alvear.es
Web site of the Alvear winery, providing information on its history, facilities, winemaking processes and products from its estates in Córdoba, Extremadura and Argentina. It also includes tasting notes on all its products. (Spanish)

www.bodegascastano.com
Web site of Bodegas Castaño, providing information on its history and philosophy, a catalogue containing tasting notes on its main wines and sections dedicated to winemaking in Yecla and its vineyards. Very good Web design. (English, German, Spanish)

www.gramona.com
Web site of Bodegas Gramona, including its history, production process and comments on its wines, cavas (sparkling wines) and spirits. It also includes a list of distributors. (Catalan, English, Spanish)

www.bujanda.com
Web site of Bodegas Martínez Bujanda, containing its history and philosophy, a description of its facilities and vineyards, and tasting notes for the wines on each of its three estates: Martínez Bujanda, Finca Valpiedra and Cosecheros y Criadores. Very good Web design. (English, German, Spanish)

www.reservaycata.com/espanol/bodegas/bo30.htm
Bodegas Mendoza does not have its own Web site, but on the Web site of Madrid wine shop "Reserva y Cata" is a page containing all the main details for this winery. (Spanish)

www.vinapedrosa.com/default.htm
Web site of Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas, giving its history and philosophy, describing its location and facilities and providing tasting notes for its main wines. (English, Spanish)

www.invino.ca/Piqueras.html
Bodegas Piqueras does not have its own Web site, but the Web site of this French magazine includes a selection of tastings of its wines taken from the international press, explaining their different characteristics, in particular those of the firm's wine Castillo de Almansa Reserva. (English, French)

www.bodegasdecastilla.com
Web site of Bodegas de Crianza de Castilla La Vieja with information on its vineyards and cellars, as well as tasting notes for its main still and sparkling wines. The Web site also includes details on three of the group's other bodegas: Cuevas de Castilla, Bodegas Toresanas and Vallebueno. (English, Spanish)

www.vinexcal.com/bodegas/fichabodega.asp?idbodega=14
Web site of Vinexcal, Grupo Exportador de Vinos de Castilla y León, with a section given over to Vinos Sanz which includes information on its history and grape varieties, as well as a section with key data containing general information on the firm, and tasting notes on its main wines. (English)

Sanz: Rueda's Big Dynasty

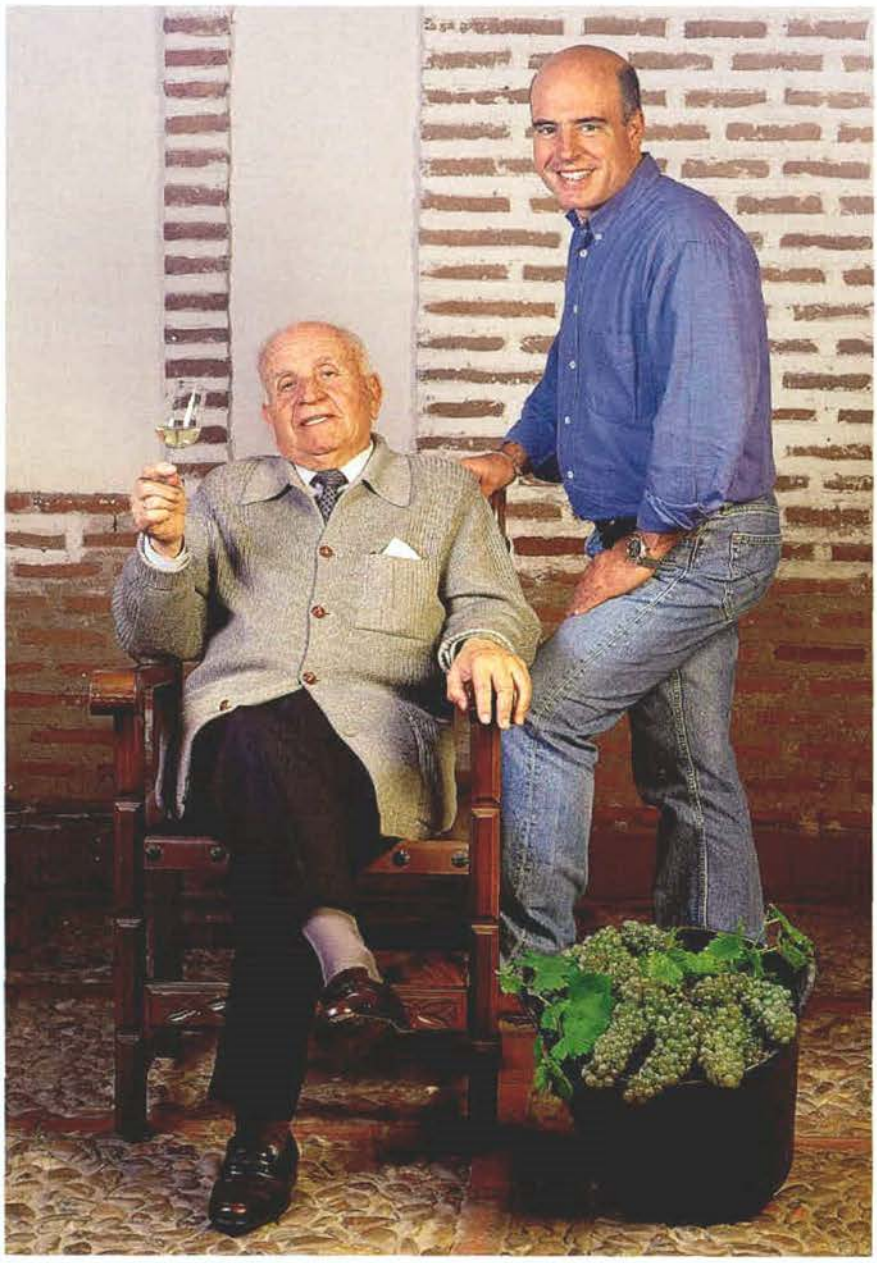
This family is split into two branches, which run two of the most cutting edge wineries in D.O. Rueda. The history of wine in Rueda can virtually be read in the Sanz family annals, a story which began in La Seca and continues in Rueda.

La Seca is the true wine capital of D.O. Rueda. It has always been the locality with the greatest area of vineyards and the most wineries. That said, however, it is a long way from the Autovía del Atlántico, the main highway through this part of Castile. Thirty years ago, when Francisco Hurtado de Amézaga "invented" Rueda wines as we know them today, he chose a roadside site for his winery, thereby making Rueda the nerve center of an area which would adopt its name when it became Castile's first Denomination of Origin in 1980.

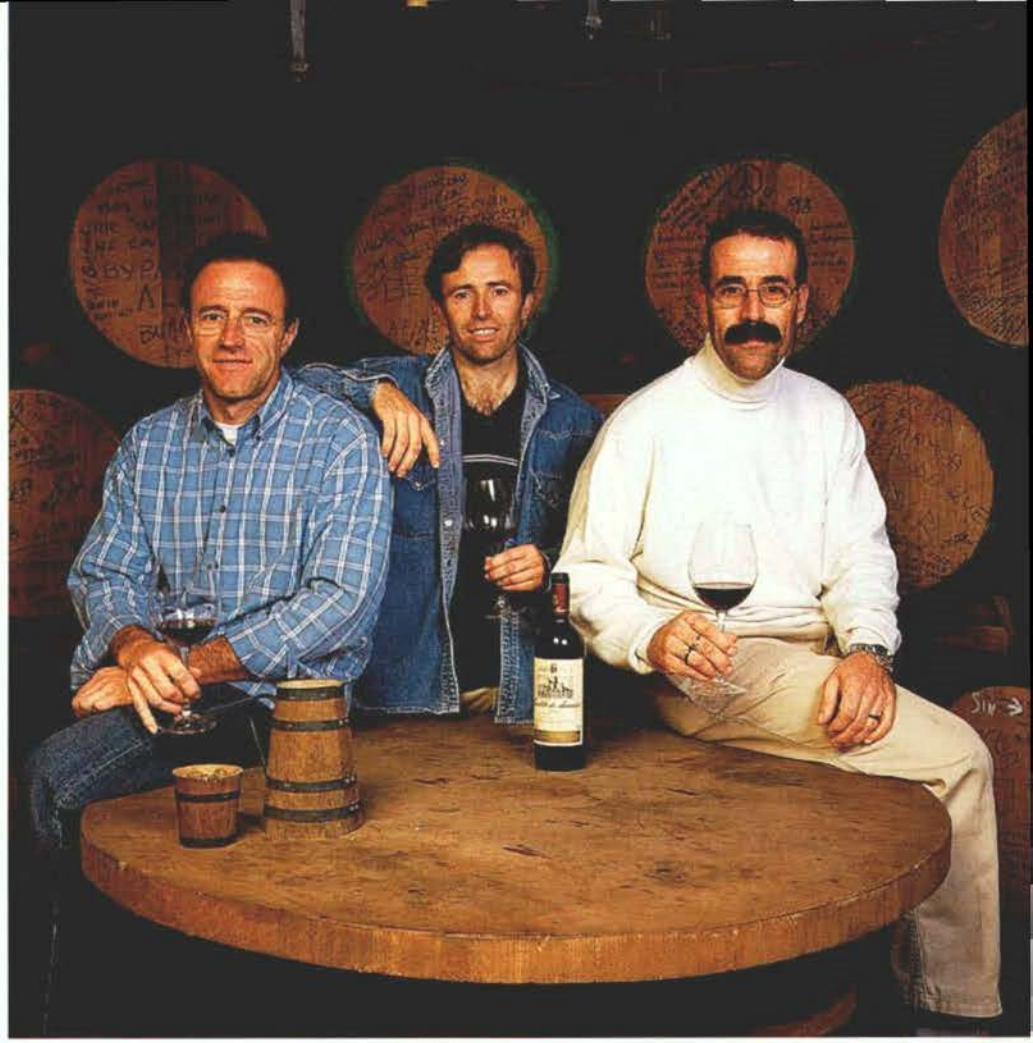
When Hurtado de Amézaga arrived in Rueda, the Sanz family had been making wine in the area for a hundred years: in 1870, Donato Sanz, heir to a long family tradition of vine growing, started making wine, which he sold in Asturias and Galicia. His descendants followed in his footsteps: his grandson opened a winery in Medina del Campo, followed by his son, Segundo Sanz, who took over the reins of both bodegas in 1960. Ten years later, he opened a winery in Rueda–also beside the main road (direct sales have always been an important part of business in all Rueda's wineries)–placing his son, Antonio Sanz, at its head.

Antonio and Ricardo Sanz of Bodegas de Crianza Castilla la Vieja

In 1974 after a family rift, Antonio Sanz set up Bodegas de Crianza Castilla la Vieja. His father sold most of his company, Vinos Sanz, to the powerful Vinoselección Group (Spain's oldest wine club) in 1984, but continued to run it.
So there are now two strings to the Sanz family bow (there are other Sanz, some related and others not, in other local wineries), and the rivalry between them seems to be channeled in the best possible direction, each aiming to make better wines than the other. The two companies have taken different routes, the Rueda-centered Vinos Sanz opting for stability while Bodegas de Crianza de Castilla la Vieja has been more expansionist, so that as well as almost surrounding Vinos Sanz, it also has wineries in Ribera del Duero and Toro. Both are wineries with a human face, represented by two of Castile's best enologists: Antonio Sanz and his nephew, Javier Ayala Sanz, fifth and sixth generations of a family which has been hands-on involved in all the innovations so characteristic of winemaking in Rueda.



Segundo Sanz and Juan Carlos Ayala Sanz of Vinos Sanz



Front left to right: Angel, Juan Pablo and Luis Bonete

Bodegas Piqueras: Braving It Alone

There was something of the Lone Ranger about Mario Bonete García who, like the cowboy hero, braved alone the trials of the open plain in the form of the dispiriting viniculturral panorama represented by Almansa, and indeed almost the whole of Castile-La Mancha: unremitting bulk wine.

Castile-La Mancha has six Denominations of Origin, of which D.O. Almansa is certainly the least well known. Yet despite its modesty, and despite the fact that for many years it had only one bottling winery, it was always regional leader for quality bottled wine production. Castillo de Almansa wines were among the region's best for years, making regular appearances on lists of Spain's top wines. And there they remain, the quality getting even better while a new winery, launched with the 2002 vintage, is brought into play. All this is thanks to Mario Bonete García, a pioneer who refused to accept the limitations of the status quo, which condemned his local wines to anonymity on the bulk market.

Mario Bonete was not a winemaker when, in 1954, he took over the bodega founded in 1910 by his father-in-law, Luis Piqueras. He started his career as a telegraphist, later worked for an Almansa distillery, and was an excellent wine taster. Armed with this background, and with the knowledge acquired through worldwide travel and studying on his own, simply reading books on enology, he began bottling wine in 1961–on the 31st of May to be precise, the day his son Juan Pablo was born. Today, Juan Pablo is the family winery's enologist. Having established a prestigious reputation for both his brand and his area in the toughest of times, Mario Bonete died in 2000. The bodega is now run by three of his four children: Juan Pablo is the enologist, economist Ángel is in charge of administration, and Luis manages production.

This new generation has taken the family winery into a new phase. In 2002 they have also gone into viticulture: they own a 120-hectare (296-acre) estate very close to Almansa, where they have planted 20 hectares (49.4 acres) of vines this year, to be expanded to 45 in 2003. They have started with Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah, and in the new plots will be planting Merlot, Tempranillo and white grapes, probably Sauvignon Blanc and Verdejo, with which they have recently done some very pleasing experiments.

They also still use their long-standing grape suppliers, who provide the new bodega with grapes from their old Monastrell and Garnacha Tintorera vines. Garnacha Tintorera is an underestimated variety about which we can expect to hear a lot from Almansa very soon.

Front left to right: Ramón Castaño, Jr., Daniel Castaño, Ramón Castaño, Sr., Pedro Pablo Castaño

Bodegas Castaño: Struggle to Survive

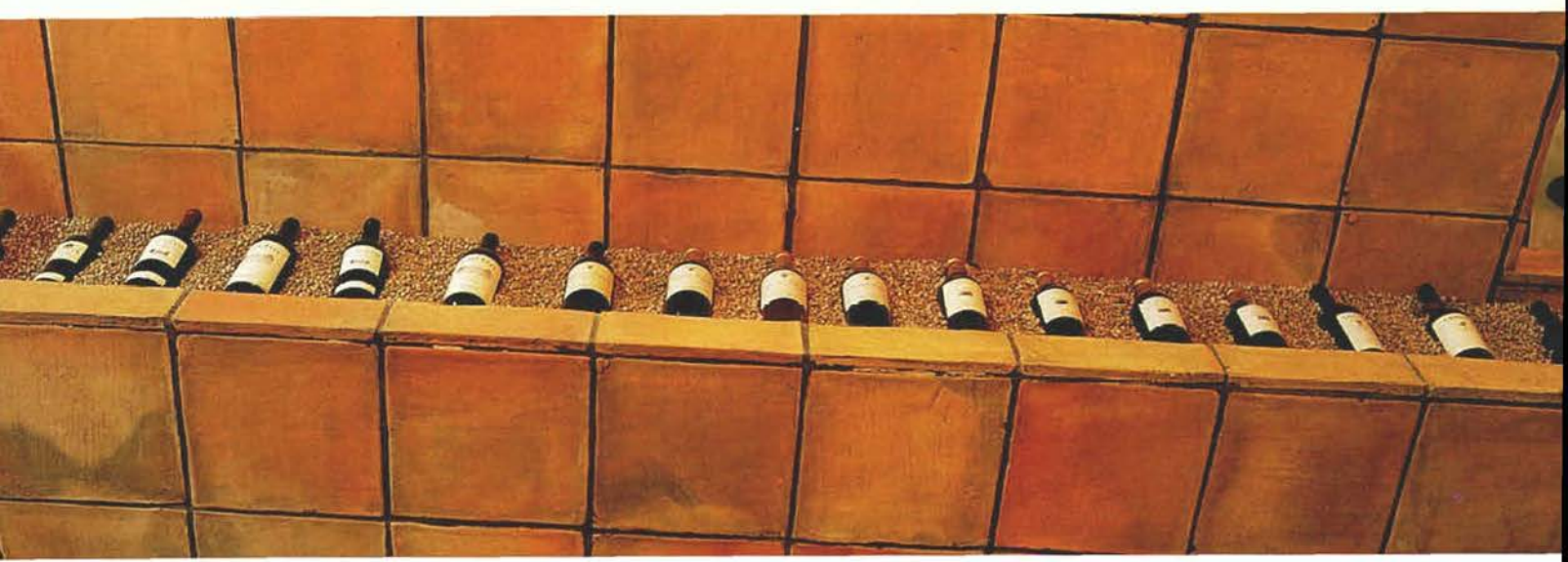
The story of the Castaño family is one of a struggle for quality. In an area like Yecla, with its harsh conditions and uninspiring reputation, it takes on epic proportions. Only the tough can handle this sort of struggle to survive.

Ramón Castaño junior likes to say that commercially they are branded with a letter Y for Yecla, which is tantamount to a curse. And he's not far wrong. Situated in the heart of the Levante's high plateau, one of the best wine-growing environments in Spain, this area was always known as a source of bulk-market wines–crude, high in alcohol, and considered unsuitable for aging. In the face of all obstacles (the local ecology, lack of prestige, not to mention bureaucratic impediments–seemingly designed to impede the progress of Spanish wine), Bodegas Castaño is revealing the acceptable face of Yecla in the form of refined, serious wines based on native variety Monastrell.

In the 19th century, nearly everyone in Yecla made wine. The town had over a hundred bodegas, one of

which belonged to the Castaño family. Today, just three bodegas survive, one of them the town cooperative. The Castaños–fourth and fifth generation of the family dedicated to vine growing and winemaking–run the most noteworthy of these. Bodegas Castaño could have gone the way of all the rest had not Ramón Castaño decided in 1981 to set his sights on quality bottled wine. This was the second major shift of direction orchestrated by the current boss; in 1950 he had built a new bodega, subsequently much expanded and modernized, and extended the family vineyards, which today cover 300 hectares (741.3 acres). Since that time, the whole family has been obsessed with quality, both in the vineyard, still under the close control of Ramón Castaño senior, and in the winery, run by his sons Daniel and Ramón.

Their production profile, designed by the whole family and put into practice by enologists Ramón Castaño junior and Mariano López, has been gradually modified to create a wide range of wines (over a dozen brands, some made exclusively for a specific market or customer) which changes in tune with their ongoing quest for new formulae. One early example of this was their planting of "foreign" varieties, used in varying proportions in some wines and also the source of interesting varietals and combinations with Monastrell. They have finally put their faith wholeheartedly in the qualities of the trusty Monastrell grapes from their ancestral vineyards in the dry Levante highlands.



Gramona: Two Faces of the Same Bodega

The cliché about two sides of the same coin applies perfectly to this family firm, committedly traditional in its approach to *cavas* and quite the opposite in its approach to still wines. Furthermore, it encompasses the winemaking tradition of two families.

The wineries of Penedès are exploring still wines as an alternative field of production, focusing on reds with a view to reviving an old tradition (this was a red-wine producing area before phylloxera struck). They will also need to catch up with Catalonia's cutting edge wine-growing areas, led by Priorato, for Penedès, once the regional leader, has been left behind in this regard. Today there are only a few wineries still dedicated exclusively to sparkling wines: one after another, traditional cava houses have opened up new, still wine ranges. Gramona was one of the last to move into still wines, and even then it retained traditional petillant *vinos de aguja* as part of its range for quite a while.

Gramona came into being in 1921, when José Gramona, whose family both grew grapes and ran a carpentry workshop, married Esperanza Batlle, heiress to the Celler Batlle winery, founded in 1881. They started making cava there that same year; while José Gramona proactively explored other wine-related areas, opening several *tabernas* and founding a specialist newspaper, *La vid catalana*. Gramona is run today by enologist Jaume, who also finds time to teach cava-making at Tarragona

University, and winery manager Xavier. They are the fourth generation of the family to run this bodega and the 34 hectares (84 acres) of Gramona-owned vineyards plus an additional 28 hectares (69 acres) under its direct control.

Their range of wines reflects the dual personality of a winery attuned both to the most dyed-in-the-wool traditionalism and the most daring avant-garde. Its cavas are faithfully traditional. The merest hint of Chardonnay (incidentally, a variety present in this area for the best part of a century in the vineyards of the Raventòs family, owners of Codorníu) lends an innovative touch to cavas which still use a cork stopper during aging while all others have gone over to the crown cap. In his still wines, the enologist gives free rein to his imagination, using exotic varieties and innovative winemaking techniques to create highly personal wines, such as the fragrant Gessami, a Pinot Noir rosé, the unique, sweet *Vi de Gel* (Ice Wine), new reds, and more.

Top row: Jaume and Xavier Gramona

Bottom row: José Luis and Bartolomé Gramona

Front left to right: Carlos Martínez Bujanda Mora, Jesús Martínez Bujanda, Ana Martínez Bujanda Mora, Pilar Martínez Bujanda, Carlos Martínez Bujanda, Alfredo Santander Martínez Bujanda, Marta Santander Martínez Bujanda

Bodegas Martínez Bujanda: Rioja in the Blood

This Álava family is deeply attached to its *terroir* while shunning convention and artificial barriers. Unorthodox in certain respects, and skilled interpreters of the best qualities of their patch and its Riojan grapes, they have just opened a new winery in La Mancha.

This family winery's front man is Jesús Martínez Bujanda, a respected and battle-hardened enologist. Actually, it is run by an impressive team, with his brother Carlos in charge of international markets, enologist Gonzalo Ortiz (a doubly prestigious name in that his father, also Gonzalo Ortíz, was a key figure in the heyday of Bodegas Berberana and a living legend of Riojan winemaking), and a new generation in the form of young Ana and Carlos, who have just joined. Though this winery dates back more than a century, it came into its own around 1981 when it changed course with a completely new image and style of wines. Brands dating back to that time are still current, the range having been enhanced meanwhile by some outstanding wines (such as a Garnacha varietal, a grape championed by this winery before it became a trendy "discovery") and by experimentation with different varieties, both native and foreign.

Joaquín Martínez Bujanda started making typical vineyard owner's wine in 1889 in an old winery in the center of Oyón (Rioja Alavesa), which is now a museum. As founder, he was to pass on to his descendants a love of the land and a taste for vineyard expansion, buying up new plots even at a time when the fashionable thing was not to own your own vines: he bought Bodegas Montecillo (today's Finca Valpiedra) from the Osborne group in 1973, for example. In this way the bodega has amassed 400 hectares (988 acres) of vineyard in the three Riojan subzones, expanded in 2000 with the purchase of a 1000-hectare (2,471-acre) estate in La Mancha, 200 hectares (494 acres) of which are under vine.

When they took charge of the winery in 1981, the fourth generation of the family, Pilar, Jesús and Carlos Martínez Bujanda, found themselves dealing with classic wines whose commercial distribution was limited. While respecting their Riojan roots, they updated the profile of the wine, creating the Valdemar brand for young wines and Conde de Valdemar for *crianzas*. Little by little, they have gained prestige so that by today they are among the most sure-footed wineries in Rioja. Important to this have been an enviable consistence of production, even with difficult vintages (indeed, this house seems to specialize in making great wines in the least prestigious years), and a range of wines enhanced with such specialties as the two Martínez Bujandas (a gran reserva Garnacha varietal and another with "other" varieties), and the splendid Finca Valpiedra. Look out for new wines from La Mancha!

Andrés Proensa *is a journalist and author of the* Guía Proensa de los Mejores vinos de España *wine guide.*

Exporters page 116 and Credits page 136

Celebration of FOOD

Part 3

When foreigners visit Spain for the first time, one of the things that strikes them most forcibly–apart from the late hours we keep–is the amount of time we devote to eating and how interested we are in the whole subject. Leaning up against a bar sampling *tapas*, or seated at the table of the simplest or most sophisticated restaurant, a Spaniard is in his element. And what's more, the conversation during any meal is quite likely to be about gastronomic matters. Is this an obsession? A passion?... We'll leave that to the psychologists. What we do know is that, despite the new patterns and customs that are being absorbed inexorably at all levels–the workplace, the home, and so on–for the moment, eating is still much more than a nutritional issue in Spain.

This attitude has produced the many fiestas that punctuate the Spanish calendar in which food plays a leading role in one way or another. In some cases, the whole celebration revolves around a single product, such as the *chorizo* (star of several fiestas), or cherries; in others, the focus of the festival is a specific dish, such as *fabada* (Asturian bean stew) or *paella*. Many fiestas, while having a religious basis, culminate in the blessing of characteristic foodstuffs which are offered up to the saint whose feast-day it is.

Often related to the agricultural calendar, fiestas are held throughout Spain, but Asturias and, especially, Galicia in northwestern Spain are the regions with the most: Mariano García and Fina Casalderrey catalogue over 240 in their book *Festas gastronómicas de Galicia* (Gastronomic Festivals of Galicia). Some date back many centuries, whilst others are simply traditions that people have always known, such as the annual pig slaughter carried out in rural areas at the start of the cold weather with a view to producing sausages, hams and other charcuterie to last the whole year. Every member of the family played some role, and it provided the perfect excuse for a big fiesta.

Some are of more recent vintage; the fact that a couple of new fiestas are created every year suggests that they are in no danger of extinction. The way that the public responds to them suggests much the same thing: some fiestas attract enormous crowds, while others are more local in their appeal.

This new series takes a closer look at just a few of the many fiestas–some open-air, some indoor, some hot-weather, some cold–held all over Spain in celebration of food.

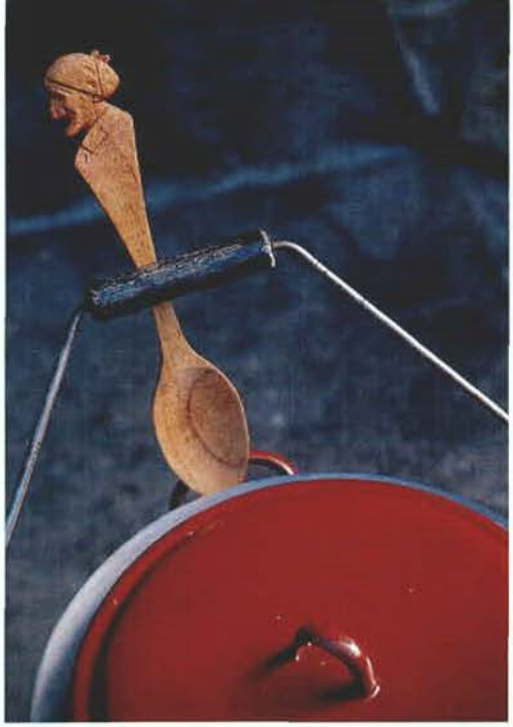
TEXT
BINGEN URQUIJO

TRANSLATION
HAWYS PRITCHARD

PHOTOS
MATÍAS COSTA/ICEX

Bean Feast in the Basque Country

The Basque Country is a land of great cooks and great eaters. The names of Irízar, Arzak, Subijana, Berasategui and Arguiñano–all Basques–are writ large in the annals of Spanish haute cuisine. They all acknowledge the ingredients and recipes of their native traditional cuisine as their source of culinary inspiration. Every October, the town of Balmaseda in Vizcaya province holds a big gastronomic fiesta devoted to just such a traditional dish–a red bean stew known locally as *putxera*.



Balmaseda is the oldest town in Vizcaya. It was founded in 1199 by *don* López Sánchez de Mena as a natural communication hub between the great plain of Castile and the Bay of Biscay. Eight centuries after its foundation, the town's seven thousand five hundred inhabitants and 4,000 visitors take to the streets and squares for an annual fiesta devoted to the communal cooking and eating of putxera–a stew of red beans with pork and charcuterie redolent of the history of a town established as a punctuation point along routes of both trade and pilgrimage.

The 23rd of October became a significant date for the town in the Middle Ages. After the death on that date in the year 407 of Bishop Severinus of Bordeaux, his reputation for sanctity had spread rapidly among the Franks. What became the cult of Severinus was introduced to Balmaseda in the 13th century by pilgrims passing through the town on the coastal route to Santiago de Compostela. Over the centuries, it emerged as a tradition for the town's several *cofradías* (gastronomic societies) to mark significant saints' days with sumptuous meals for their members. In 1718, for example, the Society of the Assumption marked its specific feast day with a dish which involved wheat, beef, saffron, onion, pepper, cloves, pears and wine. Throughout that period, too, the election of mayors and aldermen was marked with a celebratory dinner, and it was also the custom for suppliers of oil, fish, candles and meat to put on big meals in honor of such public figures.

This centuries-old tradition was both consolidated and updated by the institution in 1971 of the *Concurso Internacional de Putxeras*–the International Bean Stew Competition which has been held annually ever since on 23 October, San Severino's Day. What the Balmasedans cook in honor of their medieval patron saint is actually a dish of relatively recent provenance, created on the railways during the Industrial Revolution. The red bean dish itself can be either a *puchera* (the Castilian spelling) or a putxera (the Basque spelling), but the contraption invented by railway workers for cooking the stew during the train journey between La Robla (León) and Bilbao is definitely a putxera. Interestingly, the Cantabrian town of Reinosa holds a similar festival-cum-competition every 20 January for a dish known as "*olla ferrocarrilera*" ("railway hotpot").

Jumping Beans

The railway line linking Bilbao and La Robla was inaugurated in August 1894 to transport coal from the mines of León to the blast furnaces of Bilbao's steel works. The men employed by the new railway company as engine drivers, guards, ticket collectors, mechanics, and so on, came from Balmaseda and other towns and villages in the Basque Country, Castile, and Cantabria. These were men used to eating a lot and eating well.

No one knows quite when, but at some point it became customary for engine drivers to cook a traditional bean and pork stew on board the train, tapping hot (100°C/212°F) steam from the locomotive's boiler for the purpose. By feeding the released steam into the putxera through a valve, they were able to keep the stew cooking gently during the long journey. With the introduction of diesel engines in the 1960s, the old steam trains became museum pieces thus putting an end to this sort of railway stew.

A guards' and ticket collectors' version survived, however, since they used charcoal rather than steam for cooking up bean feasts in the body of the train rather than the locomotive. Their model of putxera utensil is the sort used in Balmaseda today. A cylindrical device with three legs and a handle, it incorporates a porcelain pot. A little door controls the rate at which the charcoal burns, while other openings in the base and around the top let air in and steam out when necessary. Each putxera is craftsman made, Balmaseda's José Antonio Gómez being the best-known maker. He learned his craft in the railway's central workshops and takes about 30

hours over each putxera, decorating each one with motifs relevant to its prospective owner, usually a surname-related escutcheon or the emblem of a club or company.
Accounts of those journeys from the León coal mines right up to the Cantabrian coast conjure up a vivid mental image of several putxeras hanging from each wagon to avoid spillage, swinging safely as the train rocked its way around the twists and turns of the hundreds of track between La Robla and Bilbao, leaving a warm, familiar smell of slowly cooking beans in its wake...

How to Cook Putxera...

This same smell permeates Balmaseda every 23 October, emanating from the many putxeras set up in Plaza San Severino, where groups of friends and visitors start assembling around nine in the morning to start preparing their stews. Their minds and conversations are still full of jokes from the previous night's performance by comedy group ÑKU, which opens the patronal fiesta on the night of the 22nd with a humorous review of local and world events over the past year.
Hundreds of cooks eventually start preparing their putxeras all over Balmaseda as the town gradually comes to after a night of wine and dancing. Oscar Ortiz de Vallejuelo, 2000 champion, repeats a by-now traditional ritual of setting up his putxera at the foot of San Severino church's Baroque tower. He ignites 2 kg (4 1/2 lb) of charcoal under the putxera, waiting for it to glow red before placing the pot in position. In the pot are 2 kg (4 1/2 lb) of red beans, 1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) of ham bones, 1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) of salt pork and a generous slosh of olive oil. To this are added finely chopped vegetables–a large onion, a green pepper, a large, ripe tomato, a leek and two cloves of garlic. Oscar "scares" the stew with cold water to keep it just off a boil. When the beans are half-cooked, a kilo of pork loin-and-rib and five or so chorizos are added. *Morcillas* (spicy blood sausages) are cooked separately and added at the last moment, contributing a touch of salt to the beans. All this time, the square is filling up with people keen to have a go at cooking. The putxera cooks slowly for four hours and is then left to rest for a further half hour. In the meantime, the town goes festive: church bells ring out for high mass, musicians playing the traditional Basque *txistu* (flute) and *dulzaina* (shawm, a 13th century woodwind instrument) parade through the streets, and the Plaza San Severino resounds with laughter and proposed toasts. Meanwhile, a warm aroma of gently cooking beans, pork and sausages wafts through the town....
In this festive atmosphere, a jury made up of ten gastronomes samples

BALMASEDA, CAPITAL OF LAS ENCARTACIONES

Balmaseda, just 30 km from Bilbao, is the capital of Las Encartaciones, Vizcaya Province's most westerly *comarca*, or county, made up of the municipalities of Arcentales, Carranza, Gordejuela, Güeñes, Lanestosa, Sopuerta, Trucios and Zalla. All of these possess interesting historic buildings in an unspoiled natural setting.

Balmaseda has many fine historic buildings: its medieval Puente Viejo (Old Bridge); the Gothic church of San Severino with a Renaissance retablo by the Beaugrant brothers, romantic stained glass windows by Dagrant, and a baroque tower and façades; the Urrutia and Horcasitas stately homes or *palacios* and the Casa de la Villa, also baroque; the baroque convent of Santa Clara; and the Fábrica de Boinas la Encartada, a former Basque beret factory now converted into an Industrial Revolution Museum.

Local events include an enactment of the founding of the town each 24 January; a medieval market one weekend in March; and a famous Passion Play during Holy Week.

Carranza is in an agricultural and stock-rearing area, source of some of the Basque Country's finest meat, and of D.O. Idiazábal cheeses made from Lacha sheep's milk. Significant historic buildings include the baroque Ahedo and Villapaterna palacios and San Andrés church. The natural environment of this part of the province is worth exploring: the holm-oak wood at Speña; Torca del Carlista (one of the biggest potholes in the world), Pozolagua caves and El Karpín Ecology Park. A Classical Music Festival is held in the caves on the second and third weekends in July.

Zalla holds an agricultural produce fair known as El Día de Gangas (Bargain Day) on the first Monday after Rosary Sunday. The18th-century Palacio Murga is one of its more outstanding historic buildings.

Where to stay and where to eat:

Hotel Restaurante San Roque
Campo de las Monjas 1
Balmaseda
Tel: 946 102 268
Hotel and restaurant housed in the baroque buildings of Santa Clara convent.

Sidrería el Cartero
Barrio el Molinar-Carranza
Tel: 946 806 674
Traditional Basque cider house, located in a typical Basque *caserío* (farmhouse), and serving a classic menu to match.

Balneario el Molinar
Barrio el Molinar-Carranza
Tel: 946 806 002
A 19th-century spa in an Alpine-style building, run by Palotine monks.

each and every one of the 130 putxeras entered for this competition, 31st in the series. The jury takes two hours to evaluate each of the stews for presentation, degree of "doneness," and flavor. As the San Severino church clock chimes three, the jury makes the announcement that the winner of the 2002 putxera competition is Iñigo Gómez of Balmaseda. The square is emptying gradually: it's time to eat putxera, and people are heading for their "*txokos*."

...And How to Eat It

The Basque word "txoko" means "place," but has the more specific meaning of the locale where family members, friends, or members of a club meet up for a big, festive meal (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 42). For the purposes of this fiesta, the Town Hall's 18th-century arcade becomes Balmaseda's premier txoko. Once the panel of judges has reached its decision, tables are set up under the arches so that they can tuck into putxeras cooked that morning. We shared our putxera in the Etxe Gorri txoko, tucked away behind San Severino church. The party there was made up of about twenty friends–children, businessmen, laborers, farmers, students, *pelota* players, local politicians–all enjoying bean stew while the conversation ranged from last night's ÑKU jokes, through how good the beans have been this year, to how the putxera can be used to cook a delicious *marmitako* (another traditional Basque stew, made with bonito and potato)... "We must make a marmitako for my birthday–I'll treat you all," someone shouts from the far end of the table; corks are pulled, the year's good and bad news is examined and discussed. Beans, chorizo, morcilla and salt pork disappear from plates while jokes are exchanged around the table, plans are made for future feasting and a scheme for a Christmas trip to La Rioja Alavesa to stock up with new wines for the txoko cellar is hatched.... "Remember that marvelous meal we had at that winery in Haro?"...

Desserts arrive, and along with them the sensual aroma of cigars and the garnet sheen of *patxaran*, the liqueur made in the Basque Country and Navarre by macerating sloes in anis-flavored marc. The putxera stands empty in the corner, awaiting the next get-together or even next San Severino's Day, though the smell of this year's bean stew still lingers in the air. Post-prandial conversation at txoco Etxe Gorri gives way to song: Sara, Santi, Jagoba, Tomás, Mari Carmen, Mariano, Maitena, David, Benita, Ezequiel and other friends declare evening with a slow habanera, a melancholy genre brought back by Spanish emigrants returning from Cuba, known as indianos. "*Ven a Balma*," go the words, "*que aquí se vive feliz, cantando y bebiendo txakolí*."–"Come to Balma; we live happily here, singing and drinking chacolí."

***Bingen Urquijo Garay**, a native of Balmaseda, is an information manager. He has worked on various information and documentation projects in Latin America and the E.U. and is author of the travel guide:* San Severino de Balmaseda; Guia del Viajero.

WEB SITES

Balmaseda

www.balmaseda.net
Balmaseda Town Hall's Web site gives information about history, historic buildings, fiestas, cultural activities, tourist routes and accommodation. (Spanish)

www.enkartur.net
The Web site of the Encartaciones Tourist Association (Enkartur) includes general information about the association, the geographical area it covers, its economic and business infrastructure, and items of touristic and cultural interest. Interesting links. (Basque, English, Spanish)

www.guiabizkaia.com/museos/Museo_Encartaciones/index.htm
This Guide to Vizcaya Web site has a section on the Encartaciones museum. (Basque, English, Spanish)

THE BASQUE COUNTRY'S GASTRONOMIC FIESTAS

The Basque Country is second only to Galicia as the region of Spain with the greatest concentration of food-related fiestas. Here is a selection of some of the more outstanding ones in each of its three provinces:

Alava

Llodio
Last Saturday in August: Día de la Morcilla, a fiesta dedicated to this spicy blood sausage.

Vitoria-Gasteiz
San Prudencio's Day (28 April): traditionally celebrated with a dish of snails and *perretxikos* (St. George's mushroom, *Calocybe gambosa*).

Vizcaya

Bakio
31 August: marmitako (bonito and potato stew) competition.

Bilbao
Santo Tomás' Day (21 December): Christmas market selling traditional products.

Guernica
Every Monday throughout the year: a market selling traditional products.
Last Monday in October: special Feria Extraordinaria, the biggest market in the whole of the Basque Country.

Munguia
San Pedro's Day (29 June): Sukalki Eguna, a meat stew competition.

Plencia
Last Saturday in June: big meal staged by the gastronomic society dedicated to the *txirla*, a clam-like mollusk from the Bay of Biscay.

Santurce
Easter Monday: traditional meal of *cornite* (bread with egg and chorizo) and sardines, washed down with txakoli (chacoli–the Basque Country's white wine).

Guipúzcoa

Astigarraga
Third week in January: this town's famous cider houses throw open their doors for a fiesta showcasing all their classic foods–salt-cod omelet, chops, cheese, walnuts and cider.

San Sebastián-Donostia
San Sebastián's Day (20 January): celebrated with a dinner of *angulas* (elvers) in the gastronomic societies' txokos.
Assumption of the Virgin (14 August): traditional dinner of salad, lobster, tournedos steak and dessert.
Santo Tomás' Day (21 December): fair selling traditional local products includes a *txistorrada*–a chance to sample *chistorra*, a local sausage.

Guetaria
17 January: Día del Txakoli (Chacolí Day), during which anchovies and bonito are eaten accompanied by chacolí.

Hondarribia-Fuenterrabía
On varying dates during the summer: *sardina eguna and atún eguna* (tastings of sardine and bonito, respectively).

Irún
Second Sunday in June: the Cofradía del Salmón gastronomic society organizes a salmon tasting.

Ordicia.
First Sunday in July: cheese tasting staged by the Cofradía del Queso Idiazábal gastronomic society.
Second Wednesday in September: cheese competition and auction, at which winning cheeses fetch enormously high prices (3,666 euros at last year's event).

Tolosa
Second fortnight in February: bean competition organized by the Cofradía de la Alubia de Tolosa gastronomic society.

Zumárraga
Santa Lucía's Day (13 December), a *buskantza* (lamb morcilla sausage) competition.

TEXT AND PHOTOS
HEINZ HEBEISEN/ICEX

Rice Festival in Sueca

In mid-September, everything in the small city of Sueca, some 30 kilometers (19 miles) south of Valencia, revolves around rice. The high point of the Festa de l'Arrós is nocturnal paella cooking by aficionados, as well as the International Competition of Valencian Paella, at which 45 cooks from all over the world participate, including some from Japan. This year, the euphorically celebrated annual rice feast took place for the 42nd time.

The fire blazes under the large pan, and twenty-four year-old Antonia has her Ray Ban sunglasses on so she can keep a close eye on the most important concern this September night: the rice for the paella she is cooking. The wilder the flames flicker, the more intensively the young lady must work with her scoop. The sneakers Antonia is wearing appear to demonstrate that stirring the rice at this early stage of paella-making is a form of high-performance sport, its objective being to avoid rice sticking to the pan at all costs. Just a few steps further on, Jaume is working on his own form of paella art. The 20 year-old perfectionist approaches the tasks in a more intellectual manner. Although water and wood are actually provided by the city, he has still brought his from home. "It is the wood above all else which is enormously important for the taste of a paella. This is why I always use wood from the orange tree, which gives the paella a very special flavor," he lectures. He naturally also uses the legendary Bomba rice, which is grown very nearby, in the area around the Ebro River estuary. It is an old type of rice that only yields half as much as the newer cultivated species, but in return, its small round grains have an excellent, intense flavor. It increases in volume by a factor of two or three while cooking, but nevertheless remains firm and does not dissolve into fibers. There is no question: for the hundreds of amateur cooks who give of their best at the 134 fire sites, the paella is not simply a dish. It is already part of a life philosophy. After all, the eastern coast of Spain is the birthplace of paella.

Rice, a crop which belongs to the family of cereal grasses, was brought

to Persia as a cultivated plant thousands of years ago from South Asia, and some time later Alexander the Great introduced it to the eastern Mediterranean. Spain was the most important location in Europe for cultivating rice, as the Moors planted it here for the first time around the year 1000; rice production then extended thanks to the mild climate. It was in the 19th century that the Albufera, a huge marshland area near the city of Valencia, was dried out and subsequently criss-crossed with an ingenious system of irrigation canals. Rice field upon rice field soon filled it. Nowhere else is the deep connection between the people and this rustic classic of rice varieties as clear as in this communal cooking ritual, which is simply known as *Paellas nocturnas*. It is the prelude to the final weekend of the Sueca rice festival and always takes place on the first Friday evening after the 8th of September. From 9 p.m. the area around Jaume I Street. turns into a peculiar hive of activity. Hundreds of young people hit the streets, some with paella pans of all sizes under their arms, while others carry the other bags and coolers filled with drinks. Aside from cold beer, they also take the local country wine, made from the powerful Monastrell grape, a natural and perfect complement to the paella festival. Like everywhere else in Spain, the youth is organized into festival groups; here they are called *colles*. Upon arrival, the groups stock up on wood and water. A three-meter high pyre stands in the middle of the festive turmoil stacking scrap wood from a local carpenter's workshop. The paella cooks pull out what they consider to be the best pieces of wood from the rapidly decreasing tangled pile, while their colleagues drain the water they need from the provided tanker vehicles. The 134 numbered semicircles drawn on the ground are soon transformed into paella kitchens.

Daylight gives way to night in Sueca, and the more cheerfully the flames of the small fires flicker, the more tempting is the steam rising from the pans. The fragrance of saffron and chicken broth that gradually spreads out over the whole area makes the mouth water. As the 134 paellas near completion, the faces of the young men and women doing the cooking shine with satisfaction and expectation in the light of the myriad fires. It is fascinating to watch how a campfire and the pleasant anticipation of a tasty meal increases the feeling of togetherness and loosens the tongue. One hardly ever hears as much laughter as during the night of the paella. In popular jargon, the flat pans with the two characteristic handles have got the same name as the meal, that is, paella, but people actually call it *paellera*. The pan diameter varies from 30 cm (12 inches) to over one meter (40 inches), according to whether one is preparing 8, 10 or 50 portions. The huge paella containing 1,200 portions, prepared on one of the following festive days, cooks thoroughly in the largest pan of all, which is several meters in diameter.

By 10 p.m., the spectacle is reaching its high point. The still flickering fires have become glowing heaps of hot embers that are cleverly distributed evenly under the pans by the paella aficionados. Here, eight giggling secondary school girls sit around their pan. A little further, a sports association has set up a table for 50 people, and the president is making a toast. Everywhere are intensive discussions on whether this year's paella is better or worse than last year's, and an international fireworks competition begins with loud bangs and a rain of stars. The competition includes the participation of innovative pyrotechnicians from as far away as Böblingen, in Germany. Later, the paella cooks dance around the gradually dying fires to the rhythms of rock band Liverpool. Some participants' faces are covered in artful charcoal patterns, while others theatrically swing their now empty paella pans in the night.

The Competition for the Professionals

At exactly 10 a.m. on Sunday morning, yet another paella is being cooked on the Passeig de l'Estació, right next to the Sueca railway station–but the contrast with Friday's nocturnal spectacle could not be greater. Now the 45 participants wear buttoned-up white work aprons that cover their clothing up to their stand-up collars and awe inspiring, reinforced chef's hats. The atmosphere is tainted with intense concentration and nervousness, reminding one of the moments right before an important school examination. No wonder: in just a few minutes, one of the oldest and most prestigious cooking competitions in Spain will begin. Held for the first time in 1961, the event put Sueca on the map, establishing its reputation as the main city for rice throughout Spain. In 1987, the competition went international thanks to the participation of Japanese cooks.

Now it begins. The chefs stream into a white tent where the ingredients and equipment lay ready: a 50-cm (20-inch) paella pan, a tripod, chicken, rabbit, snails (Vaquetes), various kinds of beans (Garrofó and Tavella), olive oil, garlic, tomatoes, rice (naturally, with labels certifying its origin: "Arròs de València"), the *pimentón* (a type of paprika from Spain), saffron, salt and rosemary. The regulations are strict. Only these ingredients are allowed, and anyone using other elements will be disqualified. The whole point of this cooking competition is to make the best possible "Paella Valenciana" using the same pan, the same ingredients, the same water and the same wood. The official recipe has been approved by the Club of Chefs of the autonomous region of Valencia. So what is the secret of perfectly preparing what is perhaps the most universal meal in the Spanish kitchen? The opinions of the cooks differ widely but the word *amor* (love) is always mentioned as the most important ingredient. The decisive factor is therefore the love with which the paella is prepared. Other cooks have a much more pragmatic view. "The art is to add exactly the right amount of water at the right time and also to perfectly regulate the intensity of the fire and the hot coals," says Juan Antonio Rodriguez, a cook at Madrid hotel Meliá Castilla. He also stressed something that we had already heard at the popular Paellas Nocturnas: that the fire should be made from the wood of the orange tree, which is available in abundance in the region of Valencia. The slightly sour aroma of the wood is considered to help the rice grains to remain loosely bound and not to glue together in a sticky mass. Someone who is very familiar with the fire is Ms. Nobue Kusaka from Japan, who works in the Mercado de España restaurant in Tokyo. Hers is the most beautiful of all the cooking sites, erected in a perfect triangular form. Her whole work area

shines with the clarity and aesthetics of the Far East. She appears to have developed the preparation of paella into a Zen ritual. Nobue traveled all the way from Japan for the third time to take part in this competition, which was reason enough for the city of Sueca to grant her the status of Honorary Citizen.

For two long hours the cooks work in deep concentration and–as opposed to the folkloristic event on Friday–in absolute silence. Small wonder: at the Paellas Nocturnas, the main idea is to have fun, but here is it is a question of honor. Time and again the cooks put the testing spoon to their mouths, periodically checking the state of their work of art with a critical countenance, in order to further perfect it with another pinch of salt, a little saffron or rosemary. In the meantime, the assistants tend to the fire with their hooks and forceps, and carefully add water time and again. They do the basic work, without which there can be no perfect paella. At exactly 2 p.m., the command goes out, "away from the fire!" The cooks and their assistants grab the pan by the handles and form a perfect two-stream platoon on the way to a nearby restaurant, where the judging will take place. If one could see this curious procession from above, it would look like a

THE "OFFICIAL" RECIPE

The cooking of paella is always a blend of ritual and festival, and is often also an opportunity for gastronomic debate. It is not for nothing, as a dictum says, that there are as many paellas as there are cooks. Also, do not be shocked by the fact that the following "official" recipe for paella is for 15 people, since in Valencia nobody would dream of making paella just for two. In addition to this, the portions in Sueca are, as the local author Joan Fuster expresses in his book *Elogi del meu poble*, for the *laurador*s, the workers, and are larger than in the city of Valencia, where they are measured out for the *senyorets,* the gentlemen. The paella can be made using all kinds of ingredients and variations, meat, fish, seafood and mussels:

Paella Valenciana for 15 persons

3 kg (6 1/2 lb) of chicken

3 kg (6 1/2 lb) of rabbit

4 dozen snails

1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) of Garrofó beans

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) of Tavella beans

1 kg (2 1/4 lb) of Ferradura beans

4 dl (13 fl oz) of olive oil

4 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped

4 ripe tomatoes, peeled

2 dessert spoons of ground paprika

1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) of rice from Sueca

Saffron strands

Salt and 1 sprig of rosemary (according to taste)

Cut the chicken and the rabbit into 30 evenly sized pieces, add salt and slowly fry in the paella pan using hot olive oil. Wait for the meat to cook thoroughly and then add the vegetables into the pan and fry them. Then add the garlic, paprika and tomatoes. Add 4.5 liters (7 1/2 pints) of water and the snails, allow them to cook for 10 minutes, and then add the saffron strands and the rice, distributing them evenly throughout the pan. Cook the whole mixture over a powerful flame for 8 minutes and then reduce the heat, letting the paella simmer for a further 8 minutes to allow the socarrat (rice crust) to develop.

millipede with 45 small round pans on its back, marching forward in a lurching rhythm. The amusing scene only stops once; the gates are closed at the railway crossing. A regional train puffs slowly by the 45 paellas. The jury meets in a hall with chandeliers and wrought iron window grilles. Each of the nine members of the jury selects the best out of five paellas, and these nine paellas then come into the final round. They are again tasted, this time by all of the judges, and awarded marks. On one of the paellas, the trained taster detects pepper, which is disallowed according to the recipe, so this paella will naturally be disqualified immediately (but is later eaten with great pleasure). Each paella receives a series of five partial marks for the taste, the color, the symmetry of the ingredients, the consistency of rice and the so-called *socarrat*. This almost magical and untranslatable word describes the fine crust of rice that sometimes sticks to the bottom of the pan. It should be toasty, but not burned. For the children, by the way, the high point of the rice festival is simply to scratch the socarrat out of the pans with a spoon, making an infernal racket. Once the judging is complete, the paellas cooked during the competition are served to around 700 guests in the Restaurant Cancela, along with other gastronomic specialties of the Province of Valencia. The unsophisticated wines of the region are those that best complement a paella. They are not too aromatic or heavy, and in the end it is the taste of the paella that should be in foreground. Once the endless speeches by every politician present finally do conclude, Luis Marcelino Gómez (from catering company SPC in Valencia) is proclaimed winner of the 42nd Paella Competition. The greatest applause, however, is earned by the person in second place, Nobue Kusaka, who does not hesitate to donate her prize money to the old peoples' home in Sueca. However, where does the secret of perfect paella lie for Luis Marcelino, the winner of the cooking competition? "The art is always to have the right level of heat at the right place. Here, one must be more of a scout than a cook," he says with a smile.

WEB SITES

www.sueca.nu
The Sueca City Council's official Web site contains information about the location, history, and places of interest, eminent local citizens, festivals, and gastronomy (Spanish, Valencian).

www.lapaella.net/paella.html
A Web site devoted to paella. Contains information about this typically Spanish dish: the recipe, the typical types of rice grown in Valencia, the Albufera kitchen and links to other sites on the subject of paella, on the region of Valencia and on the world of culinary art in general (Spanish).

Heinz Hebeisen *was twice honored as a photographer (1987, 2000) with the National Tourism Prize, Ortiz de Echagüe, awarded by the Spanish Ministry of Tourism. He is the co-founder, managing director and chief photographer for the Spanish edition of* Vinum.

At 10 a.m. the 45 participants begin to prepare everything. The whole point of this cooking competition is to make the best possible "Paella Valenciana" using the same pan, the same ingredients, the same water and the same wood (from the the orange tree). At 2 p.m.the cooks form a perfect two-column platoon on the way to the restaurant where the judging will take place... and the winner of the 42nd Paella Competition is Luis Marcelino Gómez.

RECOMMENDED LOCATIONS

Sueca:
Sueca lies 33 kilometers (20 miles) south of Valencia and 37 kilometers (23 miles) from the airport at Manises, easy to reach both from the coast road and from Motorway A7 and the national road N-332. The city also includes eight kilometers (five miles) of beach from El Perelló to Mareny de Vibres. There is a small bank at La Muntanyeta dels Sants from which one can enjoy a pleasant view of the rice fields.

L'Albufera:
Eighty percent of the L'Albufera natural park lies within the municipality of Sueca. The moor islands that rise out of the water are used by migratory birds as a nesting and resting place during winter. The peninsula El Palmar is a good starting point for boat trips, which are also offered by many restaurants.

Cullera:
An important town for tourism by the sea. The pilgrimage church Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación located next to the castle ruin, dating back to the 13th century, offers a view over the rice fields to the west and the winding alleyways of the old city, and a view to the east of multi-story buildings along the beach which can house up to 100,000 visitors in the summer. The Rice Museum (on the road to El Saler) is housed in a former chapel. There is a pirate museum near the lighthouse in the Dragut cave.

BIG CHEESE LITTLE CHEESE

On the Farmhouse Trail in Liébana

JUAN MANUEL SANZ/ICEX

TEXT
VICKY HAYWARD

"Everything here is good, although small," wrote Spanish novelist Benito Pérez Galdós, describing the food he ate on a trip to Liébana in 1879. Life here in a valley lost among the northern Spanish mountains seems dwarfed by the dimensions of peaks rearing up on all sides. Thunder cracks dramatically in the air during mountain storms. Below, the valley shrinks by comparison. The hay meadows are scaled like handkerchiefs, medieval churches hold just a handful of people, roads and bridges seem designed for mules rather than cars. The food, as in Pérez Galdós' time, is also on a small scale. Local river trout, hams, black sausages, walnuts, chickpeas, lettuces and plums on sale at the weekly market in Potes, the valley's main town, seem small by today's supermarket standards–but not so their flavors. So it is, too, with La Liébana's farmhouse cheeses, produced on a tiny scale. Blue-veined Picón and lesser known mixed-milk Quesucos–literally, little cheeses–emerge from modest family-run dairies, but their individuality and flavors give them larger than life personality. Today they are two of Spain's seventeen cheeses safeguarded by the European Denomination of Origin (D.O.). Rightly so. Consider them on the scale of taste and aroma, or diversity, or the producers' achievement in keeping alive their craft traditions–and these are big cheeses.

In the age of the global village, Liébana remains a traditional *terroir* unshakably enclosed by its geography. Squeezed between spectacular Asturian massifs to the west and Cantabrian hills to the east, it sits just 40 km (25 miles) inland from the coast and is shaped by three steep-sided river valleys which run down into the main valley of the River Deva as it flows north hugging the Sierra de Andara–the eastern massif of the Picos de Europa–and speeding down a deep, rocky ravine to the flat coastal plain and the sea. Altitudes leap dramatically here from 500 meters (1,640 feet) on the valley floor to mountain passes at triple that–and then jump again to the highest jagged limestone massifs which break the 2,000 meter (6,560 feet) mark. Close to the passes lie the mountain's summer grazing pastures–divided by chasms, littered by giant cracked boulders, pock-marked by damp karstic caves and reached by shepherds trails which zigzag up steep slopes. To compensate for the crazily hooked bends, distances here are measured in time rather than kilometers.

The Cheese Revolution

"It was a *real* revolution," says Andrés Gonzalo. Aged 35, he runs his parents' farm in Lon with his wife Chus. She makes the cheese while he looks after a traditional herd of mixed livestock–300 cows, goats and sheep. "As a child I'd ridden up on mule to see summer cheese being made in the mountain caves. Then, in less than ten years, we jumped from the old ways into the modern world. Tourists began to come to Potes market to buy cheese and a new generation of cheesemakers emerged. The denominations were born, we were given courses on cheesemaking, little by little we built proper cheese kitchens and curing chambers and we began to label the cheese–it was all a revolution." Andrés is not exaggerating. As late as the 1970s, cheese was still being

made here as it had been for centuries. Every family had their own methods, making their cheese in the farmhouse kitchen with the milk to hand. Certain villages had their own traditions. Pido cheese, unmolded and drained in a cheesecloth, was eaten fresh as a loose white mass of creamy curds. From Lebeña, a village in the gorge with no lowland meadows, came a pure ewe's-milk cheese. Quesucos from the Camaleño valley were made with varying blends of cow's and goat's milk. In summer, when the men took the animals to graze on mountain pastures and lived there with the herds for three months (see box), they were smoked and cured for longer keeping. The blue cheese from Tresviso and Bejes, the highest cheesemaking villages, had won fame when Alfonso XIII began buying it on his annual hunting trips here at the beginning of the last century, but it was still sold the old way, matured for months or even years, carried down to the weekly market in Potes wrapped in maple or sycamore leaves. When the cheesemakers sold they did so on their own terms, and nobody reined in their individuality.

In the 1980s, however, cheese lovers began to ring the alarm bell. As the valley's population was aging and emigrating–it halved in the last fifty years of the 20th century–so the cheesemaking traditions were disappearing. A few enthusiasts reacted fast. Chemist and cheese scientist Manuel Arroyo and his wife documented the artisanal techniques, while Zacarías Puente, a restaurateur, set up Spain's first cheese fair to raise cheesemakers' and authorities' awareness (see box). He traveled round the villages to collect samples, guided by Mann Sierra, a journalist who had spent decades documenting the culture of Cantabria's nine valleys. At the same time a cheese-loving civil servant in the regional government's department of agriculture encouraged Liébana's cheesemakers to organize themselves as a quality denomination. In October 1986, it became the country's first generic denomination, specially devised to cover the diversity of its cheeses–cave-matured blue Picón, cured and fresh mixed-milk Quesucos, and smoked Aliva cheese. After joining the European Union, this original invention was split into two D.O.s, registered in 1994, the first for blue Picón and the other for Quesucos.

Over the years many of the original sixty registered cheesemakers have dropped out, daunted by the growing weight of health regulations and other quality controls, but younger cheesemakers have taken up their parents' craft or come to the valley to learn it, mastering not only the old ways–the milking, cheesemaking and curing–but also the paperwork and, above all, how to sell the cheeses. In this way, then, the cheeses have survived.

The Taste of Terroir

Although Liébana is mountain country its climate is softened by a rain-shadow cast by western sierras and by a northern mountain barrier from cold northern winds. Around that microclimate has grown a closely interlocked farming system making use of every nook and cranny of the valley's limited agricultural land. On the lower slopes are planted Mediterranean vines, wheat, almonds, olives, walnuts, plums, cherries and even lemon trees. Above, on cooler slopes, grow potatoes and maize more typical of northern

Cows, goats and sheep graze in rich Liébana pastures, where a range of 500 wild grasses, flowers and other plants has been recorded.

Spain. Around and in between these grow ludicrously lush, green hay meadows–Europe's richest in botanical terms–where a range of 500 wild grasses, flowers and other plants has been recorded. The scrawnier looking mountain grass up in the summer pastures is part of another ecosystem, and is specked with chamomile, gentians and herbs. Exactly what this double biodiversity gives the milk of Liébana's cows, goats and sheep is not yet known–research is just beginning. The cheesemakers, however, are sure this is the key to the quality of their cheeses.

"If I had to pick the single most important base," says Amalia Sánchez Campo, from Bejes, whose Picón cheese last year won first prize at Cantabria's International Competition for Blue Cheeses, beating 39 cheeses from seven countries, "it would have to be feeding your cattle on the right grass and hay."

Javier Campo Campo, another Picón maker, explains why. "People argue about using fresh or prepared rennet, or milk from the right breed, or adding sheep's and goat's milk in summer, but the fundamental thing is the food chain–the milk has to

come from animals with a diet of good grass and hay. Silo fodder does not give the best cheese."

What, then, does this produce as the taste of terroir? Here is how Steven Jenkins describes the cave-ripened blues from Picón Bejes-Tresviso–its formal denomination name–in his excellent *Cheese Primer*: "... their flavor immediately electrifies the tongue with a variety of sensations and layers of flavor–blackberries and currants, bittersweet chocolate, grass and hay, leather and woodsmoke, walnuts and, yes, beef." And here is how Catalan cheese guru Enric Canut sums up Quesucos de Liébana's taste in his book *España, el País de los Cien Quesos* (Spain, the Country of a Hundred Cheeses): "normally gentle (except for very ripe or strongly smoked cheeses), smooth inside but not elastic, they are direct, markedly buttery in flavor, not heavily salted, and they carry aromas of the larder, bodega or cave ..."

There is one other identifying mark. "The great thing about the artisanal tradition in Liébana is that every cheese is different," explains Mann Sierra, the journalist. "It depends on the mix of milks, the type and quantity of rennet, and the pastures. There are no recipes. Each maker has a different approach, different hands."

As Time Goes By

That Liébana's small-scale craft tradition has survived intact is somewhat miraculous given that elsewhere in the same political region, Cantabria, cheesemakers pioneered industrial

Goat's milk Quesuco

Cow's milk Quesuco

Mixed milk Quesuco

techniques for making cheese, butter, powdered milk, condensed milk and ice cream in the 19th century. Dutch pressed-cheese techniques were imported into the nearby Valle del Pas over 150 years ago, pasteurized-milk cheesemaking was launched by a mountain farmers' union in 1932, and the widespread purchase of high-yield Fresian cattle after the Civil War paved the way for the transformation of farmhouse *queso de nata*–a deliciously camembert-like flat pancake of a cheese–into its current semi-industrial version now called Queso de Cantabria (D.O.).
But Liébana remained outside the commercial loop. Why? "In Cantabria there are three types of cheese–industrial, artisanal and domestic," explains Manuel Arroyo, the chemist and cheese scientist, now aged 84, who has dedicated his life to teaching cheesemaking and manufacturing the products needed by the cheesemakers. "Liébana's cheesemaking tradition is domestic. The idea of making it to sell came very late in the day."
Quesucos are, indeed, cheeses made with remarkably simple domestic techniques already described in Latin agricultural treatises. Liébana's first documented reference to cheese, under its Latin name "*casius*," appears in a 10th-century monastic charter listing it as part payment for a plot of land belonging to Santo Toribio de Liébana, the valley's largest monastery. The monasteries were built here in this out-of-the-way mountain retreat after the Romans had spent eight centuries colonizing the valleys, leaving behind peacefully settled fortified hillside villages that lived off shepherding, vegetable-growing and hunting. The Spanish hermits and later the Benedictine monks who followed them built dozens of small hermitages and monasteries along the valley, encouraged to do so by Alfonso I, the Cantabrian born 8th-century king who wanted to repopulate the area with peoples from the south to leave an empty no-man's-land frontiering the Muslim territories. The monasteries grew into wealthy and cosmopolitan centers of learning with large libraries, huge estates and the right to tithe the villages they protected. They made cheese with the milk from their own herds, probably following the codified Roman techniques for making fresh, semi-soft and smoked unpressed cheese. They would also have known all about blue cheesemaking since it is first documented in the 8th century in France, when Charlemagne supposedly served it in a monastery, probably near Roquefort –and ordered two crates of the cheese to be sent to him every year.
The medieval habit of using cheese as a form of currency persisted in Liébana. In other more accessible valleys, like the nearby Valle del Pas, cheeses were already being traded with pilgrims and merchants, but here, the isolated valley remained off trade routes until well into this century when electricity, roads and tourism slowly arrived. Some villages still had only a village water pump thirty years ago. The cheeses, made mainly in spring and summer, were eaten sparingly at home, or paid as tithes to landlords, or bartered in exchange for goods or services. Only occasionally, when there was a surplus in spring and summer, were they taken down to the weekly Monday market at Potes for sale. It is a mindset that continues today.
"I learned to make cheese as a child," says María Virginia Gómez Fernández, one of Quesuco's eight D.O. producers who makes goat's and cow's milk cheese. "We ate a bit at home or gave it to the doctor or blacksmith as a thank you for their services, or we swapped it for honey or chestnuts. When I started making cheese myself, the most difficult thing was to learn how to sell it."
Today that has changed.

Sheep's milk Quesuco

Picón Bejes-Tresviso

Big Blue: Picón

"Last August we hung up a sign," says Amalia Sánchez Campo, prize-winning Picón maker. "It said 'Sold out–honestly, we've got no more cheese.' But people still came knocking at the door."

Amalia and her husband Tomás sell around half their cheese directly form the dairy. People happily make the long, looping drive up from the valley to their small house and dairy in Bejes, the village where they were born. Like most cheesemakers in Bejes and Tresviso–its sister blue-cheese village, an outpost of 35 inhabitants on a neighboring massif an hour's drive away–Amalia learned the craft at home. In the mid-1980s, health inspectors came to visit.

"They said we had to build a separate cheese room or stop making cheese." Amalia and Tomás took a flying risk and upped their production to cover their investment. "I would have given up," says Amalia, "but Tomás wanted to remain in the village. This was the only way."

In summer she makes cheese from 300 liters of milk a day. Most of it comes from 16 cows stabled close to the house although now she buys extra milk from neighbors. "I analyze the bought milk–you have to keep a

LIVING IN THE SUMMER PASTURES

"We walked up to the summer pastures at the beginning of June and we stayed till early September," says Ricardo Besoy, cheesemaker, who was born in Brez, in the Camaleño valley. He first walked up to the Puertos de Aliva, the pastures where his village held grazing rights, with his father in 1942, when he was four. The shepherds lived in the high pastures for four months with their cows, sheep and goats, camping close by in shallow limestone basement caves called *majadas* or *chozas*.

"Each group of hamlets would share a cave. We walked up together. We might be eight or ten families, each with a *chon* (pig) and a mule to carry the mattresses. The walk took four hours. Mostly we were men–boys, bachelors and married men–but women came too. The caves were just next to the river and they had doors on. We bunked down in the same cave and cooked together–potatoes, rice, chickpeas and so on–and we took turns watching the animals. Each person made his own cheese–we made fewer then–just six or seven a day. When I was a child we filtered the milk through nettles, then later through wooden sieves with horsehair brushes. The rennet came from dried kids' stomachs and the whey was fed to the pigs. The cheeses were smoked at the front of the cave, with firewood close to hand–mainly juniper. On Sundays the women or older people who had stayed in the villages to make hay would ride up on mules. They would bring us food and take down the cheeses made during the week. Some were given away for favors done during the year, others were sold in Potes market. It was a hard life and a lot of work, but everything was natural."

This local transhumance, governed by local laws from the 15th century, has now almost disappeared as the valley's livestock rearing shrinks. Now the summer pastures are used mainly by meat cattle–the highly valued native breed Tudancas–and the farmers drive up there on widened dirt-tracks.

close eye on its balance of protein and fat." The finished cheeses, more pungent and less salty than raw ewe's-milk Roquefort, stronger than lowland cow's-milk Stilton and Gorgonzola, may be set apart from other Picos de Europa blues (Cabrales and Valdeón) by the individuality of farmhouse making. The cheeses combine the flavors and aromas of the raw mountain milk curds with that of a wild mold, called *Penicillium Lebaniense*, which grows naturally inside the cheese as it matures for at least two months in individually owned wet, cold limestone caves between 600 and 2,000 meters (1,968 and 6,560 feet) altitude. The mold is helped along by local *soplos*, the caves' cool air currents, by the oxygen pockets trapped in the curds and by a fortnightly washing, which leaves the cylindrical cheeses damp and only thinly skimmed by sticky mold on the outside. There is no other human intervention: no use of cultured mold, no innoculation nor wire piercing, unlike the majority of blue cheeses. Left to ripen naturally in this way, each cheese is slightly different, but the flavors are always extraordinarily integrated.

"Cave conditions are vital," says Javier Campo Campo of Tresviso, aged 40, who makes 2,500 kilos (6,000 lb) of cheese a year with his brother Miguel. They learned the craft from their mother and keep nine cows, selling three-quarters of the cheese direct from the village, where they have a hostal and bar. "A dry cave gives cheese as hard as a stone and too much dampness destroys the aroma."

The transition from traditional to registered D.O.-making and from one generation of makers to the next has brought changes. Most makers now use laboratory rennet instead of animals' stomachs. Only a few add goat's and sheep's milk in summer.

Maturing times have dropped back to between two and three months. This is, arguably, a good thing. Old-school Picóns, praised by Pérez Galdós for their "horrible fragrance," could be real stinkers only for sniffing or eating by the very brave. Another change has been the switch of wrapping from leaves to paper-lined foil. Amalia approves. "Leaves were romantic but unhygienic." Tresviso's Picón makers have also come up with a project to create a large, easily accessible, collective maturing cave a stone's throw from the village to group production and make their work less laborious. Finally, the pattern of production is changing. There are now fewer makers–eleven are registered with the D.O.–but, like Amalia, each of them makes more cheese. Last year production totaled 22,000 kg (48,500 lb).

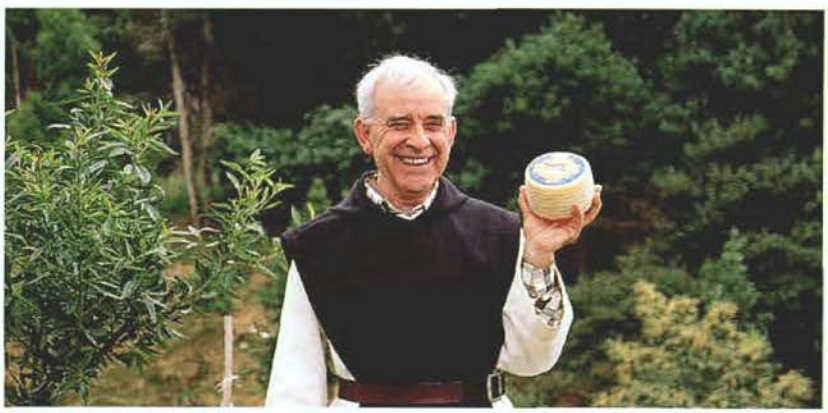
Little Quesucos

For those, like Ricardo Besoy, aged 64, who remember the flavor of Quesucos in the old days, when they were made with raw-milk, the price of survival seems costly. "They were much creamier, richer and each one had different flavors–oh, they were so good!" His face crinkles with pleasure. Now aged 64, he keeps goats and makes cheese in a spick-and-

span white-tiled cheese room under the family farmhouse in Tanarrio, with the help of his daughters Trini, aged 21, and Miriam, aged 15. However, Quesucos' loss of quality is relative: under European and North American law, all young, semi-soft cheeses with less than 60 days curing are, rightly or wrongly, made with pasteurized milk to kill any disease-causing bacteria. Otherwise, the modern making method remains unchanged. The milk is heated and curdled in a small open vat, the curds are paddle-cut finely to pea-size, the buttery-colored whey is piped out (and often reserved for the family or neighbor's pig) and the curds are then scooped directly into molds like small flowerpots, where they drain at cellar temperature before being unmolded and cured, unpressed, in damp, chilled racking chambers.

From this basic method come enough variations to provide an entire cheese board. Some derive from differences in the making process itself. Younger cheeses are creamily unctuous while older ones, cured for around a month, are firmer and yellower, and the occasional aged ones are hard and nutty. Brining gives a slightly different flavor and finish to dry-salting. One of the makers presses his cheeses and two of them smoke naturally with juniper, beech or black poplar. Other variations reflect differences between the pastures or herds owned by each maker, for example, or the natural molds in the curing chambers. Cow's and goat's milk is still the most characteristic combination, giving a mild but tangy cheese. Particular village traditions

THE CHEESEMAKING MONKS



The Benedictine monks of Cobreces, a small coastal village in eastern Cantabria, make the region's last monastery cheese. The small round wheels, locally famed for their nutty flavor, provide the monastery with its main source of income. The monks make the cheese twice a week in winter and five times a week in summer, selling just enough to cover their financial needs. "It's rather like the local queso de nata, but with one big difference," explains Brother Antonio, who has worked in the dairy since 1980.

That difference can be found in the brick bodegas discovered by workmen under the church built for the monks when they moved in here in 1908. The cool air and microflora below the high altar are perfect for aging cheeses. "We sell the cheeses when they are one month old, but the flavor keeps developing for another three to four months," says Brother Antonio.

Politics, economics and health regulations have forced the monks to move with the times. The agricultural school was closed after the monastery was temporarily abandoned during the Civil War (1936-39); in the 1970s, hard-pressed by lack of manpower, the monks sold their herd of milk-cows; in the 1980s, still making cheese with milk bought from the local cooperative, they installed new stainless steel equipment in the original white-tiled dairy to meet health regulations; and in the 1990s they began to work with prepared animal rennet extract instead of locally bought animals' stomachs. But they make the cheese with traditional care, washing the curds in warm water to remove their acidity, pressing the cheeses slowly for 24 hours before brining, and letting them dry and mature slowly on wooden shelves at natural air temperatures. "Above all, we try to disturb the bodegas as little as possible," says Brother Antonio. As we are talking, a Sunday service has started in the church upstairs and the sound of hymns floats out alongside the smells of ripening cheese.

CHEESE IS FREEDOM

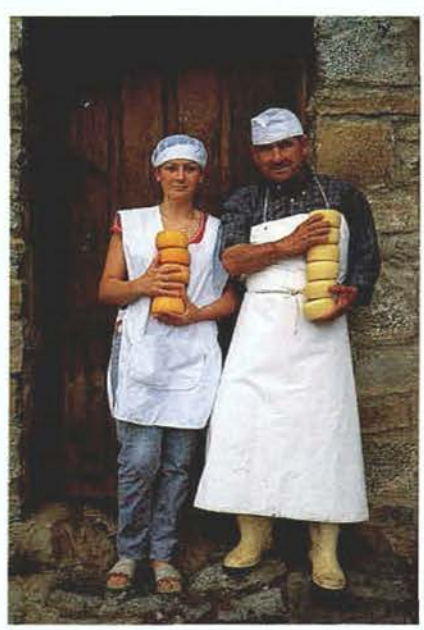
Zacarías Puente

"The basis of government policies regarding cheese should be to search for quality and differentiation," says restaurateur Zacarías Puente, knocking his knuckles on the table. Zacarías–aka "the Gentleman, Protector and Ally of Cantabrian cheeses," the "cheesemakers' champion," and other such cheesy nicknames–is, seriously, a legendary figure. In 1981 he set up the Feria del Queso de Cantabria (Cantabrian Cheese Fair), Spain's first showcase for its then unknown farmhouse cheeses. The fair aimed "to give adequate promotion to artisanal cheese and the maintenance of its traditions." Zacarías tracked down 70 virtually unknown Cantabrian cheeses and invited over a hundred wine-, bread- and cheese-makers, scientists, civil servants and food writers to his hotel in Laredo. Unsubsidized, he also paid most of the costs. The fair was a wild success and was to last ten glorious years, by which time it had become national in scope and inspired similar cheese fairs elsewhere in Spain. As recognition of his work, Zacarías was awarded the Official Cross of the Order of Agricultural Merit by King Juan Carlos. Why such an overriding passion? He says it goes back to growing up in eastern Cantabria, where he absorbed the sights, sounds and smells of the shepherds, cowherds and their flocks as they passed through traveling between the mountains and lowlands. He also tasted their cheeses when he went to the shepherds' houses to pick up payments for his father. Currently his work with cheese is channeled through

the Cofradía del Queso de Cantabria (The Cantabrian Brotherhood of Cheese), a society of aficionados and experts set up in 1985. "We would like to see regional government support for the revival of raw milk cheeses and the protection of small producers' milk quota." He also remains hands-on at his eponymous restaurant in Santander, where he serves a splendid Cantabrian cheese board, matched with wines ranging from rosé to PX (Pedro Ximénez sherry or Montilla D.O. wine), and serves an unforgettable, genuinely cheesy cheesecake.

also survive: pasteurized fresh Pido is still made outside D.O. controls. But these days the makers themselves also want to be original. "We have worked a bit like neighboring chefs to make sure we don't compete," comments Pedro Velarde, the president of the Quesucos de Liébana D.O., from Pendes. Two new inventions have appeared on the scene: one is a larger format, called a *torta*, and the other is cheese preserved in olive oil.

In this sense Quesucos are cheeses with attitude–with personal stories behind them. Ricardo Besoy, for example, who was born in Brez and started life as a shepherd, took his family to Mexico to work for 11 years to save up and buy a 20-hectare (50 acre) farm. He sticks as far as he can to the old ways and would like to revive his cow herd. Juan Carlos Martínez Casares, aged 43, grew up in the Leonese mountains and trained as a teacher before he started off making cheese from just 35 liters of milk a day in 1987. He buys all his milk and takes a middle road, making a broad range of cheese, some outside D.O. con-



From top to bottom: Juan Carlos Martínez Casares grew up in the Leonese mountains and trained as a teacher before he started making cheese; Chus Camacho inherited the family's farm in Lon and slowly adapted it to modern cheese making; Amalia Sánchez Campo, from Bejes, whose Picón cheese last year won first prize at Cantabria's International Competition for Blue Cheeses, beating 39 cheees from seven countries; Ricardo Besoy and his daughter Trinidad want to keep working in an artisanal way.

trols to allow year-round production. Andrés and Chus Camacho, both in their thirties, inherited his parents' farm in Lon and slowly adapted it to modern cheese-making. Unusually, they have managed to build up a herd of over 300 goats, sheep and cows to be sure of their milk supply. He says it is the newcomers who have taught the natives how to make the cheeses workable. Pedro Velarde left Pendes for Santander but returned after his father could no longer manage the dairy and he now makes cheese with all the villagers' milk to supply a major French supermarket chain. He has combined what he considers the best of old and new methods.

There are, however, common threads to these very different stories. One is the makers' fierce passion for their craft and another is the sheer workload. The cheesemakers' day stretches from early in the morning until 10 p.m. at night and nearly everyone in the family lends a hand. In this way, the eight D.O. makers produce some 98,000 kilos (235,200 lb) of cheese a year, all of it sold within Cantabria. It is a tough, demanding way of life that makes you wonder why they stick at it. "At least I'm my own boss," says Ricardo. "But at the end of the day we all eat round the same table."

The Next Steps

There is a sense in which the cheesemakers now stand at a crossroads. They now sell everything they make locally, thanks largely to summer tourism. But, on the other hand, it is not a perfect framework. Santander, the Cantabrian capital, for example, has no specialized shop carrying a range of the region's farmhouse cheeses. Elsewhere–at the weekly markets in Potes and Torrelavega, for example, or at small gastronomic shops in tourist centers–they are not always sold in the best conditions. The seasonality and vulnerability of the market also prevents the cheesemakers from making year-round contracts to buy milk from La Liébana's livestock rearers, an increasingly important link in the chain to raising production. The following steps, to which many of the cheesemakers aspire, is to be able to

use only the milk of their own expanded herds.

"We need to change the dynamic," says Pilar García Lozano, who organizes regional government courses for beef and milk farmers receiving European subsidies. "We could return part of the regional milk quotas allocated by the European Union to small milk farms, which can be cost-effective if they sell high quality milk at a higher price. Cheesemaking is one way of doing that."

Another way of doing that would be to link cheesemaking to organic milk production. A research project now underway at Santander's Centro de Investigación y Formación Agraria (Center for Agricultural Research and Training) is looking at the costs of the entire production chain and is comparing the quality of organic and non-organic milk from cows grazed in different pastures. "Research elsewhere suggests organic milk has more monosaturated fats," says researcher Susana Gutierrez. "That makes it very interesting in nutritional terms." Since organic farming methods would coincide well with those used for making young raw milk cheeses given a certified bill of health by government inspectors–a system already underway in France–they could also provide a route back to the sensational, creamy, old-style Quesucos.

As yet, there is no clear project in hand. Nonetheless, the producers are ready for further change. "The future is in maintaining and renovating the current cheese dairies," says Javier Campo Campo. "The infrastructure has hardly changed in eighty years and we need to come up to date without affecting the quality of the cheese." There is a problem, however. All the cheesemakers work so hard that they can rarely take the day off to sell their cheese at commercial fairs–it usually means making double the quantity of cheese the following day–let alone find the spare time for larger projects. In addition, they are given little support to cope with the sharp learning curve on adapting to new food-safety laws, which come thick and fast.

What would they like to see happen next? "We don't really want to increase the volume of production," explains Trinidad Besoy González. "We want to keep working in an artisanal way that gives quality. We don't want to build factories. But we'd like to see more young people start cheese dairies here, we'd like to see the cheeses reach a wider public, find a place in good restaurants. It helps you feel your work is recognized."

Until that happens, the only way to taste these cheeses is to take the trail to Liébana–and be sure you get there before they sell out.

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See Recipes page 89, Exporters page 116 and Credits page 136

WEB SITES

www.mapya.es/aliment/pags/denominacion/quesos/liebana.htm
Web site of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fish and Alimentation that includes a section on the Quesucos of La Liébana. It provides information on the characteristics, where it is produced and how it can be obtained. (Spanish)

www.liebanaypicosdeeuropa.com
This site has information on Liébana and the Picos de Europa including their municipalities: history, monuments, routes, holidays, maps and tourism and hotel guides, products and commerce. In the section on products, there are links to individual towns that provide information on the cheeses of Liébana, history, production methods and the cheesemakers themselves. (English, Spanish).

LIÉBANA: A-Z

Ahumado (smoked) The name for smoked cheeses made in Liébana's Camaleño valley. Today purpose-built smokeries generally use poplar and beech to give characteristic flavor to year-round cheeses made with cow's and goat's milk. Liquid smoke paint is also being introduced, but moves may be made to ban it, as in the Basque cheese D.O., Idiazábal.

Cantabria Spain's smallest political region, totaling 5,290 sq km (2,042 sq miles). According to a regional government report on cheesemaking in 1997, 30 different cheeses are made in Cantabria in a total of 50 dairies, which use a total of 65,000 liters (17,173 U.S. gallons) of milk a day. Average daily production is 12,000 kg (26,455 lb) a day.

Liébana The district of Liébana is made up of seven municipalities covering 574 sq km (356 sq miles) and in 2001 had 6,030 inhabitants. The same geographical area defines Liébana's two D.O.s for farmhouse cheeses. In 2001 a total of 19 cheesemakers produced 120,000 kg (264,552 lb) of cheese, using milk from 1,048 milk-producing animals (cows, goats, sheep).

Leche de Ganado (farm animals' milk) The local term for the characteristic mix of two or three types of milk–cow's, ewe's and goat's–which is used in cheesemaking in Liébana.

Penicillium Lebaniense The native microflora, or special wild mold, which grows in the caves where Liébana's blue Picón cheeses are aged. Unlike Roquefort or other blue cheeses, Picón is not pierced to encourage the mold's spores to penetrate the cheese. The deep bluey-purple veining occurs entirely through natural penetration.

Picón The traditional Cantabrian name for blue cheeses from the Picos de Europa mountains, taken from the word *picante*, meaning strongly flavored. Since the three cheesemaking districts in the mountains fall in three different political regions, they are covered by different quality denominations. The cheese's traditional name was joined to those of the main producing villages to give the European registered D.O. name: Picón Bejes-Tresviso.

Pido Legendary soft, fresh, tangy white cheese named after the village in Liébana where it is made from cow's milk with lactic fermentation and the addition of a little rennet.

Quesería Farmhouse, or artisanal, cheese dairy.

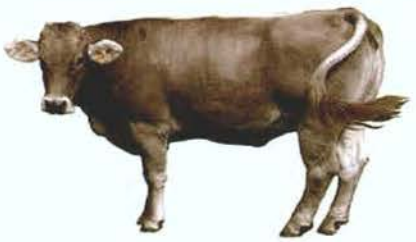
Queso de Cantabria Cantabria's first D.O., set up in 1986 to cover the traditional semi-soft cow's milk cheeses made throughout the region. Originally this was a farmhouse cheese. This is a semi-industrialized, cooked pressed cheese similar in character to Port Salut. In 2001 22,000 kilos (48,500 lb) of cheese were made.

Quesucos The affectionate Cantabrian name for "little cheeses," made throughout the region, and in areas of Asturias and the Basque Country, although they also give their name to one of Liébana's two D.O.s.

Soplos The name given to the naturally damp, cool air currents which foster the wild airborne mold spores in the caves where Liébana's blue cheeses are aged. The equivalent of Roquefort's *fleurines*.

NATURAL

BEEF for Gourmets



TEXT
DEBORAH LUHRMAN

On the steep southern slopes of the Picos de Europa, Spain's Vega Sicilia wine family is helping rekindle the spirit of a former mining community by combining the local tradition of cattle ranching with a new era of entrepreneurship and the most modern technologies–with the aim of producing the highest quality beef by rearing cattle in a way that is natural and respects the environment.

Coal mining and cattle ranching were the two pillars of the economy of the Esla River valley. The river tumbles out of the southern gorges of the rugged Picos de Europa mountain range in northern Spain before flattening out on the high plains of Castile-León, the autonomous region that covers most of the northwestern half of the country. Villages of this valley were home to some 100,000 people in 1950, but over the years young people in search of a better future began moving away to the cities. The closure of the region's coal mines in the 1980s was a final blow. Some of the villages began to look like ghost towns and by 2000 only 25,000 people were left in the valley.

One of those who moved away was David Álvarez. He went on to found the Eulen Group, a Spanish conglomerate that owns the prestigious Vega Sicilia winery and specializes in huge cleaning and security contracts. It grosses some 600 million euros annually and employs 31,000 workers.
In Spain there is a strong tradition of returning to the pueblo, at least for a few weeks during the summer holidays, and deteriorating conditions in the valley disturbed the Álvarez family on their annual visits so they decided to invest in their homeland and try to turn things around.
In 1996, they started the Valles del Esla project with the aim of "producing beef that is worthy of being eaten with the finest Vega Sicilia wines."

"My grandfather was a cattleman here his whole life and the region has traditionally been used for grazing, so reconverting it to make something like microchips didn't make much sense," says daughter María José Álvarez, president of the new enterprise.
"In addition, it is somewhat isolated from the rest of Spain and there isn't any kind of training for industrial jobs. We were trying to figure out what kind of business to start and thinking: we have land, we have animals and we have people who know something about cattle ranching–this is a solution that takes advantage of the natural resources that already exist here," she adds.

Home On the Range

Wedged in between the granite dome of Susarón peak and the Porma reservoir is the 1,000-hectare (2,500-acre) Camposolillo ranch. It is a model of natural grass-fed cattle ranching and home to 200 contented cows and steer. Amid the grazing herds we could catch fleeting glimpses of deer and antelope galloping over the upper slopes. Just down the road is the village of Lillo with its medieval watchtower and the San Isidro ski resort.

Valles del Esla insists on raising cattle that are free of any type of additives, hormones or antibiotics. The animals live in open pastures where they forage on native grasses. If the pastures are covered with snow for too long in the winter, a mixture of alfalfa hay and cracked corn is put out for them in the open air.

All of the cattle in the project belong to the Mountain Brown breed, which was introduced in the zone from Switzerland in the 1950s and is especially well adapted to the steep terrain and cold winters.

Grass-fed beef tastes different–somehow more beefy and authentic–and the natural cattle rearing system is slow, but the benefits of grass feeding are numerous.

In mass produced beef, calves are usually raised in pastures with their mothers for the first six months and then moved to feedlots to be fattened up quickly on a diet heavy in corn, other proteins and growth hormones–which are banned in the European Union but still widely used in the United States. Since this is neither an optimal environment nor a natural diet, antibiotics are routinely mixed into the feed to prevent illness. Grass-fed cattle rarely get sick so there is no need for antibiotics, which have become so pervasive in modern meat that they are sometimes blamed for the evolution of new antibiotic-resistant diseases in humans.

Environmentalists believe that cattle grazing is fundamental to the ecological balance of nature's grasslands. Cows keep trees and shrubs from invading open spaces, they also spread

TRACEABILITY, A QUESTION OF CONFIDENCE

Since the Mad Cow crisis and outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease in 2001, consumers have become more aware of the need to know the origin of the meat they buy. European Commission meat labeling regulations (EC1825/2000) became mandatory in Spain as of 2000. The system consists of a label identifying the animal or group of animals which was the source of the meat, its place of birth, where it was raised, where it was sacrificed and where it was butchered. The label should be attached to the wrapper on packaged pieces of meat or, in case of unwrapped meat, displayed on the meat counter in a place easily visible to the consumer. A reference number or code linking each piece of beef sold to a specific animal must feature on the label. Additional information, such as breed, age, or feeding system is optional under current regulations.

This system ensures the "traceability" of the product. In other words, it allows officials to track all the operations and all of the partners that have taken part in the production process, accounting for medical treatments, feeding, processing and other types of procedures that the animal has undergone. From the rancher's point of view, traceability improves the transparency of production and marketing techniques. From the consumer's point of view, it increases food safety and boosts confidence Efforts to improve the safety and security of beef and reassure consumers have encouraged Spanish producers to enthusiastically adopt new methods of traceability to

track information about each animal from birth to the meat market. While the main objective of traceability is to guarantee that the meat will be healthy, the systems also serve as a way of certifying each step in the production process and of building a data base on cattle ranching practices.

seeds and fertilize the soil. In return, the grasses provide a nourishing feed, one that humans cannot digest but that cows and other multi-stomach creatures convert into high-quality protein much appreciated by carnivores the world over. This is an ideal system especially in areas, such as Camposolillo, that are too hilly to grow any crops.

Nutritionally, a recent study in the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that grass-fed beef contained more "good" fats, such as Omega 3 fatty acids, and less saturated fats, such as Omega 6-which is believed to contribute to heart disease.

Adding Technology

While grazing and feeding practices remain patently old-fashioned, cattle in the Valles del Esla project clearly live in the high-tech age. At birth a microchip that acts as a mini-transponder is implanted in each animal's stomach so that it can be identified and traced throughout its life and onto the meat counter. In that way, strict control is maintained throughout the lifespan of the animal, tracking things like birth statistics, the ranch where it is raised; the quality of grazing land; any illnesses; and growth data. This passion for quality control continues throughout the process of slaughtering the cattle, butchering and distribution.

Eulen has invested 10 million euros in the project since its inception, creating two companies: Valles del Esla S.A., which operates several cattle ranches totaling 6,000 hectares (15,000 acres); and Neal S.A., which

owns and operates a state-of-the-art slaughterhouse, meat aging and distribution system. While just 45 people are employed in these two companies, an additional 200 local ranchers have signed contracts with Valles del Esla to raise beef according to standards established by the company–usually in small herds of 15 to 20 animals.

"We believe in the Lao Tse sentence about teaching a man to fish rather than giving him a fish. It is so much of an obsession with us that we have never given economic assistance to any rancher. There is a training phase, but they are the businessmen, the ones who assume the risks, the ones who decide whether to expand their herds and when to sacrifice their animals," says Ms. Álvarez.

Currently production stands at about 4,000 head of cattle a year, a mere 0.1 percent of Spain's total annual beef production. Plans call for gradually raising production to 6,000 animals a year and then stopping so that quality can be ensured.

According to the General Director Joaquín del Arco, Valles del Esla will never be a mass-market product, "This is an elite product. Not a product for rich people, but a product for people who are concerned about what they eat and for people who look for the ultimate in quality."

Luis González is one of the 200 independent ranchers involved in this initiative. He and his wife own a herd of 50 cattle–half of which belong to the Valles del Esla project. He joined the project and was converted to its natural husbandry methods because he knows from experience that "homemade products and those made commercially just don't taste the same."

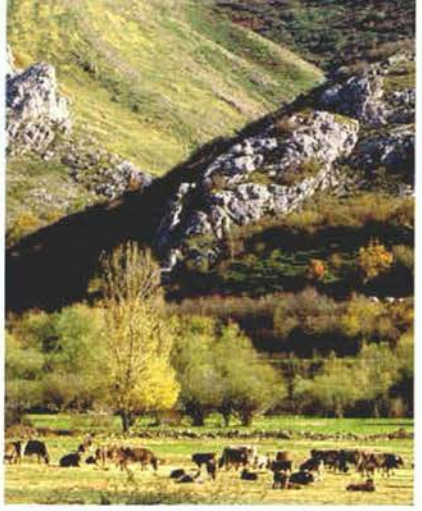
International Recognition

Just a few years after it began, Valles del Esla received international acclaim when the Expo 2000 World's Fair in Hannover, Germany, selected it as one of the world's five best examples of rural development. Judges praised the project's objective of producing high-quality natural beef as a model for ecological and socially sustainable development and said it points the way towards the future.

But it was not the first international recognition for Valles del Esla. The Neal slaughterhouse, built on the outskirts of the old mining town of Sahelices de Sabero, uses systems that go way beyond Spanish and European regulations. Its liquid and solid waste treatment system, for example, was the first in Spain to win the ISO 14001 certification for environmental management. The ISO 9002 certification of quality followed shortly afterwards.

Special attention is paid to the well being of the cattle, so that they are stress-free up to the moment they are sacrificed. Stressed and nervous animals release adrenaline, which makes their meat tough and unappetizing. The slaughterhouse is within a one-hour country drive of all of the Valles del Esla ranches, so the animals do not suffer long hot transportation ordeals. The plant is built 1.5 meters (4.92 feet) above ground so trucks can unload the cattle without using inclined ramps and the ramps themselves are specially treated to keep the animals from slipping.

Since it is a small operation, the entire slaughtering and butchering process is done much more slowly than mass



production plants, ensuring the maximum standards of hygiene.
Information from the microchip implanted in each animal's stomach is transferred to a label on the carcass and then onto each cut of meat.
Valles del Esla works in collaboration with the government's Superior Council for Scientific Research (CSIC), whose technicians run several quality tests on each animal as it comes down the production line.
They test for pH, they administer Prionix for BSE (Mad Cow disease) and search for any additives. Ranchers who have not abided by the company feed policy are found out and banned from the project. While this has only happened 3 or 4 times, CSIC inspectors also help keep the cattlemen honest by paying surprise visits to the ranches several times a year.
Financially, it is worthwhile for the ranchers to stick to the grass-fed regime, not only is it less costly than buying feed, Valles del Esla pays a premium price for their cattle, about 20 percent higher than other companies. Prices are set several times a year by a unique pricing board that includes representatives of the ranchers.
Inspired no doubt by its connection to the wine world, Valles del Esla and CSIC also run a tasting panel for the beef, working out the optimal aging conditions and identifying consumer preferences.

The Taste Test

As American humorist James Thurber once said: "Looks can be deceiving, it's eating that's believing."
So despite absolute faith in their production techniques, the Álvarez family was reluctant to bring their new beef to the table of Spanish gourmets until Valles del Esla was well established and experiments in aging conditions were concluded.
The meat first went on sale in 2000, but was presented to restaurateurs, journalists and members of the Spanish Gastronomic Society the following year in a daring taste test that pitted Valles del Esla steaks against the world's most expensive meat–Kobe beef from Japan.
While it is difficult to compare the meat of two different breeds of cattle, most of those present opted for the Spanish product–which some said tasted like the kind of beef that used to be served in Europe's finest hotels fifty years ago.
While Kobe cattle are famously pampered with beer massages that help spread fat throughout their bodies, promoters say Valles del Esla animals get the same massage-effect by climbing up and down the steep slopes of their pasturelands. In this way fat filters into muscle tissue giving it its unique juiciness and tenderness.
But there is a big difference in price, with Kobe beef selling for at least 200 euros a kilo (about $100 per pound) and Valles del Esla selling their top cuts for 35-45 euros a kilo ($17-23 per pound) in Spanish markets.
Four types of beef are marketed by Valles del Esla:

- **Milk-fed Veal** is raised in open pastures feeding only on cow's milk. It is sacrificed at a maximum age of 7 months and weighs from 145-180 kg (320-396 lbs). The color is pink, it is very tender, with a delicate flavor and very little fat.
- **Grass-fed Veal** is raised on cow's milk and grasses. It is sacrificed at a maximum age of 11 months and weighs from 170-230 kg (375-507

ORGANIC MEAT PRODUCTION IN SPAIN

The so-called Mad Cow disease (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy-BSE) has awakened the interest of European consumers in organic meats. In Spain, organic livestock operations are booming and, according to the Healthy Life Association, many ranches are adopting an organic system of production.
Organic livestock is either raised on the grass-fed pasture system or with feeds made from organic products. Great emphasis is placed on the well-being of the animals and respect for the environment and most organic ranches in Spain combine livestock breeding with organic farming.
In 2000 there were 1,082 organic operations in Spain–about half of them involved beef production.

lbs). The color is bright red, it is tender, with an intense flavor and little fat. It is only sold from October to March.

• **Mountain Veal** is raised on a combination of cow's milk, forage, cereals and legumes. It is sacrificed at a maximum age of 11 months and weighs from 170-280 kg (375-617 lbs). The color is reddish, it is tender, with a moderate flavor.

• **Steer** is raised in the traditional pasture system. It is sacrificed at a minimum age of 36 months and weighs a minimum of 800 kg (1,764 lbs). The color is dark red, with a strong flavor and firm texture.

Gourmet Dishes

Since production is low, distribution of Valles del Esla beef is selective. It is sold in some high-end meat markets throughout Spain, but mostly in gourmet restaurants. Madrid's innovative Viridiana restaurant serves the beef exclusively, with chef Abraham García turning it into gourmet dishes such as beef tips with wild mushrooms, foie and truffles or veal scallops stuffed with cheese and peppers in a sauce of Pacharán–the famous sloe berry liqueur from Spain's northern regions.

"It is an exceptional quality beef, especially the steer, because it is a true steer, something which is very difficult to find in Spain where most steer that is sold is really cow," he says, adding that he believes Valles del Esla's air-cured beef *cecina* (see more on cecina in *Spain Gourmetour* No. 47) is the best available in Spain. But selling a high-quality brand of beef to consumers at a premium price remains a challenge for Valles del Esla. Beef is one of the few consumer products that is not identified with a brand name and the company is working hard to change that.

While the Mad Cow crisis in 2001 gave the company more faith in what they are trying to achieve, it hurt sales as many consumers gave up eating beef altogether.

"We are way ahead of the marketplace in Spain; it is still not ready to accept this type of product," says María José Álvarez. "We are going against the current," says Joaquín del Arco, "This is the hardest job I've ever had and probably the hardest job I ever will have!"

Nevertheless, there are plans underway to launch export sales throughout Europe by Internet in the near future. The company also hopes to begin exporting know-how gained over the past five years to other rural development projects in Europe and Latin America.

Finally, Valles del Esla will soon begin working with the wives of their cattlemen in a new project to raise natural free-range chickens. Once again looking into the past to move forward, giving local women an independent source of income, more motivation to remain on the land, and renewed pride in a productive rural lifestyle.

Deborah Luhrman *is a freelance journalist from the United States and has been living in Spain for the past 12 years. She has contributed articles on food, wine and tourism to many publications. She is also a consultant in tourism communications and works on a regular basis for the World Tourism Organization.*

See Recipes page 89 and Credits page 136

WEB SITES

www.vallesdelesla.com
Web site of the León Valles del Esla Mountain's Whole Meat Complex. It includes information on the project's philosophy, the problems and solutions that the zone encounters, the definition of traceability, quality regulations and transformation process, data on the companies Valles del Esla S.A. and NEAL as well as on the centers press center and scientific publication bibliography on beef. Interesting photographs and well thought out design. (English, Spanish)

MARVELOUS

MARATHON

elBullihotel Hacienda Benazuza

For nearly twenty years now, El Bulli restaurant, on the Costa Brava in Spain's northeastern corner, has been opening up for the season each Spring/Summer with a treat for its devotees in the form of a menu radically different from the previous year's. Brilliant ... but hang on ... that basil-aromatized lobster gazpacho (vintage 1989), that Bresse pigeon with blackberries and anis-flavored salad (1997) ... does this mean we'll never get to eat them again? Don't worry. Ferran Adrià's latest creation, elBullihotel Hacienda Benazuza, just outside Seville serves many of those dishes of sacred memory. Better still, you can eat breakfast, lunch and dinner, take it easy and spend the night all in a seductive setting and all with the Bulli guarantee. A sort of BulliMarathon, if you like. This is my account of 24 hours worth of a marvelous marathon.

TEXT
SONIA ORTEGA

TRANSLATION
HAWYS PRITCHARD

It's midday on a hot Saturday in summer. Getting to Seville from Madrid couldn't have been easier, thanks to the AVE high-speed train which whisks one pleasurably through the dramatic beauty of the Montes de Toledo and the vast olive groves of Andalusia. Having arrived in Seville, a 15 km (9 mile) drive along the motorway takes us to the Hacienda Benazuza, just on the way into Sanlúcar la Mayor, a typically Andalusian village of whitewashed houses and narrow streets. The great outer walls and tower of the Hacienda are white, too.

We are in deepest Andalusia, at the far end of Spain from the Costa Brava, in an environment that couldn't be more different from that of El Bulli. If Ferran Adrià set out intentionally to create a contrast, he has certainly achieved it. Perhaps he was intentionally aiming for a historic setting, too, for the history of this group of buildings dates back to the mid-13th century, when the Christian King Ferdinand III (known in Spain as Fernando The Saint) conquered Muslim Seville and distributed its lands among those who helped him do so, keeping the Hacienda Benazuza for himself. Seville's haciendas were farms dedicated to olive oil production, and the tower is a characteristic of their architecture. A hacienda employed so many people that some became little villages in their own right. Benazuza was one such case: in the mid-20th century it was virtually a village tacked on the town of Sanlúcar la Mayor. Over the centuries, Hacienda Benazuza had passed from owner to owner, some of whom introduced new architectural features such as Renaissance courtyards and new gardens. It also went through periods of decline, and was divided up. Such was the pattern of its history until it was bought and restored to unity last century by the Pablo Romero family, a legendary name in fighting-bull stock-breeding. It was converted into a luxury hotel in time for Seville's World Fair, Expo '92 (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 34), with El Bulli joining the management team in time for the turn of the new millennium in 2000.

Just as El Bulli is a "restaurant with a difference" in both conception and operation (it opens for only six months of the year, creates an annual menu of over 100 dishes...), the idea was to create the hotel equivalent, starting by introducing a new menu into the restaurant, then creating an appropriate breakfast, and so on, gradually working towards the final objective.

We find the first clue that this is a hotel with a difference on reaching our room: instead of the usual basket of fruit, we find a sleek glass tray artfully strewn with juicy slices of various fruits dressed with mint and other aromatic herbs. I tuck in immediately. The marathon starts well: the combination of flavors works beautifully, and it's both delicious and refreshing.

The spacious room is furnished with lovely antique furniture of the sort

one would find in an elegant Seville home, a style that is carried through the entire hotel, as I discover when I set off to explore it. The complex structure of courtyards, corridors and gardens is enchanting. In the interior, the spectacular white of the façade is combined with tones of pipeclay and reddish ochre–two colors which crop up constantly in the houses and monumental buildings of Seville. What with the vivid blue of the sky and the green of palm, olive and orange trees, I can feel Andalusia casting its famous spell.

La Abacería

It's aperitif time, and I've arranged to meet Pepe García. He is the lynchpin of this little domain, the man in charge of ensuring that the whole thing runs like clockwork. He is going to be my "coach" during this quick plunge into the world of tastes and sensations that is elBullihotel–no, that isn't a misprint, they write it all in one like that: it's their "brand," Hacienda Benazuza. We've arranged to meet in the bar of La Abacería, the smallest of the Hacienda's three restaurants and the perfect place for sampling tapas of *Ibérico* charcuterie (ham, loin, chorizo), a really ripe ewe's milk cheese, and salted tuna from the nearby fishing town of Barbate, where such large catches are landed that it merits the title of "tuna capital of the world." There are also more elaborate *tapas de cocina*–"kitchen-made" tapas–which can be eaten as a light lunch. This being summertime, they include gazpacho, *salmorejo cordobés* (a thicker, Cordoban version of gazpacho. See

Spain Gourmetour No. 56), garbanzos *a la vinagreta* (vinaigrette-dressed chickpeas), and *ensalada de pimientos asados al carbon con bacalao* (roasted pepper and salt-cod salad). The winter tapas de cocina tend to be traditional stews, such as *pollo en pepitoria* (chicken in almond, garlic, parsley, egg yolk and saffron sauce), *potaje* de garbanzos (chickpea stew), and game dishes. These warming, hearty dishes are the classic fare of any good Andalusian *taberna*, which is what La Abacería replicates, in both food and décor.

An *abacería* is an old-fashioned small grocer's shop selling basic foodstuffs such as oil, vinegar and pulses. This Abacería does the same: its shelves hold perfect displays of products selected for elBullihotel's own use– quite a guarantee of quality given how choosy they are.

La Alberca

After a suitably serious sampling of aperitifs, it's time for lunch. I obey Pepe's instructions, and head for La Alberca restaurant, where I am due for lunch, through the Renaissance patio with its tall palm trees and vast pots of ferns, through the entrance patio (which contains a well), and along the jasmine-fringed, stone-flagged corridor that leads to the garden. There, half hidden, is a huge

swimming pool, surrounded by luxuriant vegetation and, on one side, La Alberca. The feel here is quite different: under a sort of open-sided tent, the atmosphere is Moorish, with traditional tables, but also with divans and big cushions suggestive of a post-prandial siesta. Water cascades from hanging platforms, cooling the atmosphere and providing that murmur of water so essential to any Arab garden worthy of the name. The restaurant is almost full, but Rafa Morales, elBullihotel's head chef, takes the time to meet and greet, and to talk me through the menu. La Alberca's menu is an "in-between" one: while tradition and simplicity are the motif in La Abacería, things get a little more complicated here, though nothing like as complicated as the dinner menu in the third restaurant, La Alquería, where we are to dine later. On the lunch menu are salads, local fish of the day (banded porgy, sea bream, monkfish, red mullet)–and a low-key meat section (steaks, tiny lamb chops, *gallo de Lendínez*–rooster raised in such a way that its meat has the sort of flavor one thought didn't exist anymore). There are also classic tapas and Andalusia's famous fried fish, side by side with new wave tapas such as *Sopa de pepino "tapeando"* (a light cucumber cream cold soup served in a flute glass topped with caramel wafer, cherry tomato and basil). This is the first item on a degustation menu to which Rafa Morales has added the delightfully named Paella *caldosa en "Kellogs" de marisco* (Bulli's take on a paella-cum-bouillabaisse with crunchy seafood crisps), and some beautiful, fresh king prawns from nearby Sanlúcar de Barrameda (not to be confused with Sanlúcar la Mayor). To round it all off, there's a *Copa de fresas con helado de queso fresco y naranja sanguina* (strawberries with cream cheese ice cream and blood orange).

The prevailing atmosphere is one of torpor. We, however, take the opportunity for a swim in the pool, followed by further exploration of La Hacienda, which is full of little secret places tucked away among fig trees, ponds and courtyards. We have a date tonight at the last of the three restaurants, and I haven't found it yet–it's called La Alquería.

La Alquería

This is the Hacienda Benazuza's star restaurant and the keystone of this elBullihotel, the first hotel in what aims to be a chain of five or six in Spain and (at least one of them) elsewhere in Europe within the next five years. The project is being kept very much under wraps as yet, thereby generating a great deal of fascinated speculation about what Ferran Adrià is up to. We learn just a few snippets: they are to be 40 to 50-room hotels (Hacienda Benazuza has 44); all will occupy "significant" buildings, anything from a traditional *masía* (farmhouse) in the Catalan countryside to an urban building of some specific interest. Each will have its own particular style and character: whereas elBullihotel Hacienda Benazuza offers the opportunity to eat under the Adrià banner as its special feature, another's might be a bar with the world's widest range of spirits, or an art collection. The possibilities are endless. In all cases, unpredictability will surely be a constant. Take, for example, our perfect host, Pepe García: on a rainy afternoon he can organize an off-the-cuff wine tasting for interested guests who, guided by Rafael Bellido, La Alquería's sommelier, sample some of the superb wines from their cellar; or a musical evening, or a Flamenco show for an audience of just three... This capacity creates an environment in which there is always something fascinating going on for those not delighted by the opportunity to do absolutely nothing.

But back to La Alquería. In command of a staff of 38, Rafa Morales is in charge of a sort of edible archive, reproducing some of the best recipes created by the El Bulli restaurant team in the course of its prolific existence–he worked there for seven years. Despite La Alquería's three changes of menu a year (Spring-Summer, Autumn, Winter), it is impossible to sample more than a fraction of El Bulli's hugely creative repertoire. Just work it out: over a hundred new creations per season multiplied by 19 years comes to some 2,000 different recipes. To prove the point, Rafa shows me an enormous, well-organized book that holds just one year's recipes.

The fact of being open all year round means that La Alquería can offer something that El Bulli's seasonal opening pattern precludes it from offering: menus in which, for example, game or truffles are star features. Although it is open to non-residents, La Alquería is, essentially, a hotel-restaurant. For this reason, and given that the average customer–almost 75 percent of whom are foreign, by the way–stays for four days, they change their "snacks" (the range of little *amuse-gueules* with which every meal begins at El Bulli) on a daily basis. Ten snacks and two tapas per person are chosen by the chef, while the rest of the meal is à la carte. The "carte" in question quotes the year each dish was created: this summer's menu, made up of 17 dishes, included *Salmonetes Gaudí* (Gaudí-style red mullet) from 1982 and *Sardinas empanadas con picada deconstruida* (breaded sardines with deconstructed picada sauce) from 2000. Unless you are particularly intent on eating a specific dish, I still think the best option is the degustation menu, since this also features dishes from

El Bulli's historical repertoire, albeit in smaller portions. These are served on unusual wavy plates, also an El Bulli design.
The parade of flavors seems endless: it begins with Solid whisky sour, followed by the "snacks"–*palo de parmesano* (parmesan cheese straw), piña colada en deconstrucción ("deconstructed" piña colada), *huevo de codorniz caramelizado* (caramelized quail's egg), *piel* de bacalao (cod skin), *piruleta de alcachofa* (artichoke lollipop), and so on up to the prescribed ten. Then come the tapas, six in all in this degustation menu.
These are served at a steady pace so as not to overwhelm, and include tagliatelle *a la carbonara* (the noodles are made out of jellied consommé, one of those creations where the technique is a genuine breakthrough), *melón a la parilla con hierbabuena salada* (flame-grilled melon with salted mint–a perfect contrast of temperatures and flavors), cous cous de *coliflor* (for which cauliflower is turned into light granules)...
And there are still the main dishes–four of them–to come. My favorites were gazpacho de *bogavante* (lobster gazpacho) and raviolis de *remolacha con frambuesa y gambas* (beetroot ravioli with raspberries and prawns), as delicious to eat as they were beautiful to look at.
Finally, dessert. The range includes "*Encerradito*" (little spoons of chocolate with eucalyptus jelly), *cubilete* de chocolate (chocolate mold with coconut, curry and banana) and "*pequeñas locuras*" (literally "little follies"), which are the sweet version of the earlier savory "snacks."
You see what I mean about a marathon...

Good Night, Good Morning

Bullihotel's "good night" gesture is equally original. After all, there wouldn't be much point in leaving one the usual chocolate after a meal like that. No, the complimentary detail on the turned-down bed is a little bag containing salt and a cracker embossed with the outline of the

Hacienda's tower. The accompanying note explains that the hotel is "reviving an old custom of presenting guests with bread and a few grains of salt–basic foods–as a symbol of peace and welcome."

The next day dawns as hot as the last. In the normal way of things, after a meal like last night's, my breakfast would consist of a cup of tea and little else. But my stay here is nearly over and I don't want to miss the one thing I haven't tried yet: elBullihotel's degustation breakfast, one of its star turns.

Forget everything you've called breakfast up until now–this is more like a party. A trolley arrives bearing four big silver ice buckets, containing jugs of the juices of the day. Today's are apple with basil, hibiscus, coconut with pineapple, and grapefruit with thyme. There is a range of about twenty varieties in all, and they change every day.

Butter comes in three different modalities: nutmeg, cream cheese and chive, and "Fisherman" (as in Fisherman's Friend lozenges), as does jam: carrot, praline and raspberry. These are to be eaten with brioches, croissants, pastries... It's all homemade, all fresh today, and it changes daily, so that almost 90 percent of it is different from the day before. The aim is for guests never to have to eat the same thing twice or get bored.

Fruit is served in stem glasses: papaya in its own juice, pineapple with juniper and sorbet, watermelon in its own juice, raspberry with yogurt mousse, vanilla cream with lemon jelly–it's hard to say which works best. But all this is only the sweet selection. Now for some country-style and Cantabrian anchovies with tomato bread.

It's a beautiful morning... and I've made it to the finishing line.

Sonia Ortega *has been coordinator of* Spain Gourmetour *since its first issue.*

Credits on page 136

WEB SITES

www.hbenazuza.com
Hacienda Benazuza's Web site includes information about its history, function rooms, guest rooms, reservations and local climate.
(English, Spanish)

www.elbulli.com
The restaurant's beautifully designed Web site includes information and pictures relating to Ferran Adrià's restaurant, cuisine, philosophy, location, catering service, hotels (linked with Hacienda Benazuza's Web site), press reports and recently created workshop.
(Catalan, English, Spanish)

Ferran Adrià

9

Food Editor and Styling
María Jesús Gil de Antuñano
Recipe Photos and Styling
Toya Legido/ICEX
Translation
Jenny McDonald

RECIPES









Canapés of Quesuco Cheese with Caramelized Onion

Serves 4:

1 brioche-type loaf of bread
1 smoked Liébana Quesuco cheese

Caramelized onion:

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) onions
4 tbsp brown sugar
4 tbsp oil
4 tbsp vinegar
Salt

Caramelized onions: Finely slice the peeled onions and place in a pan with the sugar, vinegar, oil and salt. Simmer until any liquid has evaporated and the onions are beginning to caramelize. The process can be speeded up by cooking the ingredients in a covered container for 15 minutes in the microwave, then quickly boiling off any excess liquid.
Slice the bread into medium-sized slices, trim any rind off the cheese and cut it into wedge shapes. Place one wedge of cheese on each slice of bread then top with a spoonful of caramelized onion. Place the canapés in a hot oven (200°C/360°F) for 5 minutes to quickly melt the cheese.
Serve hot, direct from the oven.

Recommended wine:

A sweet red D.O. Jumilla made from Monastrell grapes with an attractive, bright, cherry-red color and an aroma of ripe fruit. Its full, slightly sweet flavor should blend well with the creamy cheese and juicy onions.

Couscous with Caramelized Quesuco Cheese

Serves 4:

1 Liébana Quesuco cheese
300 g (10 1/2 oz) couscous
1 firm red tomato
1 thin green pepper
1 scallion
Chives
1 dl (6 tbsp/4 fl oz) oil
Salt and pepper
Sugar for caramelizing

Warm vinaigrette:

1 firm red tomato
1 thin green pepper
1 scallion
Chives
1 dl (6 tbsp/4 fl oz) virgin olive oil
2 tbsp sherry vinegar
1 tbsp sugar
Salt and pepper

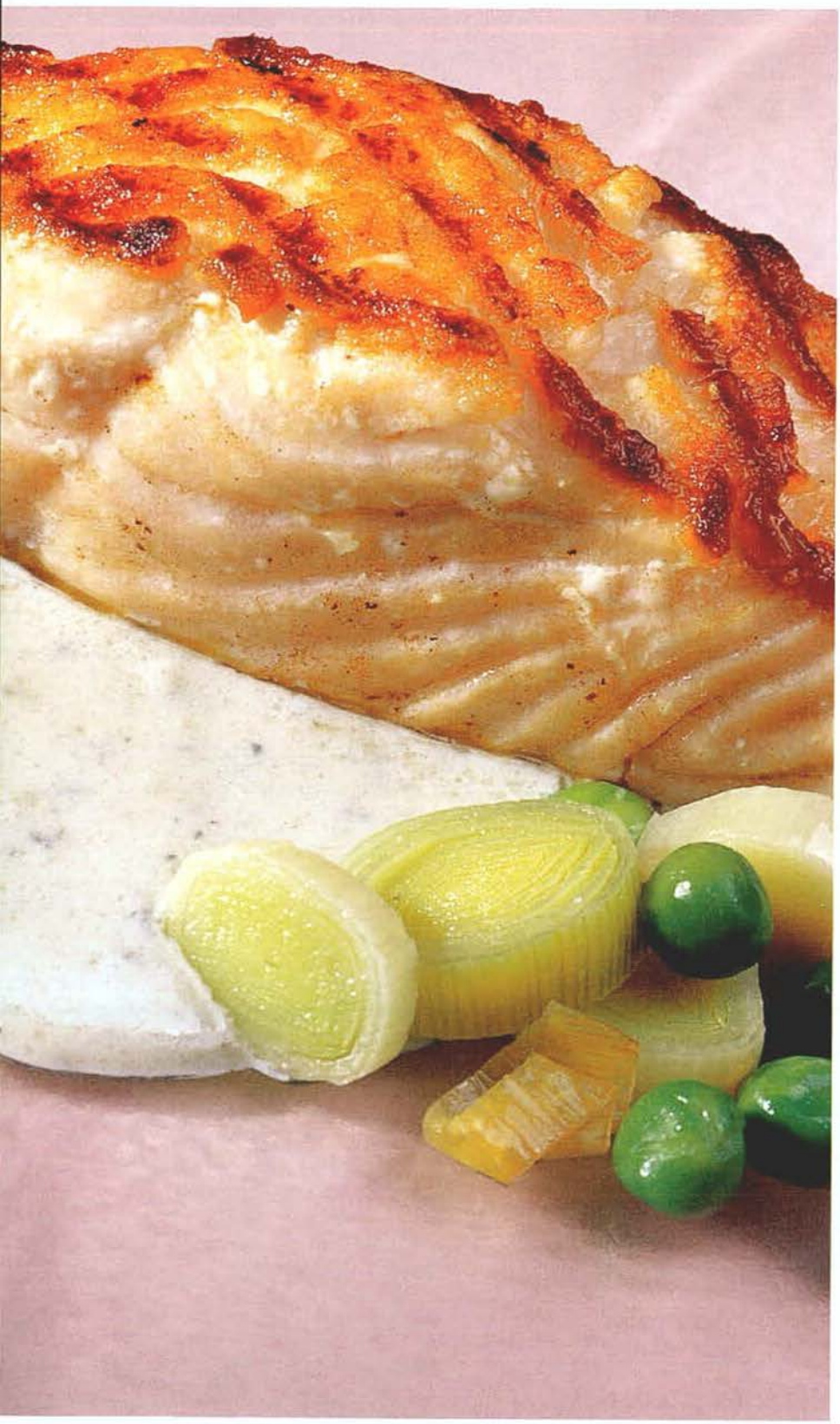
Prepare the couscous by following the instructions on the pack. Finely dice the peeled tomato, cut the pepper into small pieces and chop the scallion and chives. Place in oil and heat gently, just until the vegetables are soft, without frying them. Mix with the couscous and season with salt and pepper. Fill individual molds with this hot mixture and turn out on the plates. Place a round slice of cheese on top, sprinkle with sugar and caramelize with a red-hot metal spatula or under the broiler.

Warm vinaigrette:

Chop all the vegetables very finely. Dissolve the sugar, salt and pepper in the vinegar, add the oil then the vegetables and bring to a boil. Serve warm with the hot couscous mixture.

Recommended wine:

A young rosé made from Tempranillo, Garnacha and Verdejo-Albillo from the D.O. Cigales with an appealing, raspberry-pink color, a very fruity nose with hints of strawberry and raspberry and a fresh, balanced, very fruity flavor that lasts in the mouth.



Salmon Steaks with Picón Bejes-Tresviso Cheese

Serves 4:

4 salmon steaks
Salt

Cheese sauce:

2 leeks
200 g (7 oz) frozen or canned small green peas
200 g (7 oz) Picón Bejes-Tresviso blue cheese
2 dl (7 fl oz) thin cream
1 dl (6 tbsp/4 fl oz) oil
Salt, pepper and lemon juice

Cheese sauce:

Wash the leeks, slice into rings then cook gently in the oil in a covered frying pan (or in the microwave for 5 minutes). Cook the peas for 5 minutes only, whether frozen or canned (both are pre-cooked). Cut the rind off the cheese and break into pieces. Place in a pan with the cream and heat, stirring all the time, until it has melted. Add the stewed leeks and the peas. Boil lightly and check the seasoning.
Wash the salmon steaks, season and grill. Serve with the cheese sauce.

Recommended wine:

Try a white Chardonnay from the D.O. Navarra, with a clear, bright, straw yellow color and characteristic, varietal golden shine, with perfume of herbs and honey. In the mouth it should be smooth, full and persistent with a touch of sweetness.

Chicken Breast Fillets with Picón Bejes-Tresviso Cheese

Serves 4:
4 half chicken breasts, skinned and boned
1 chicken carcass
150 g (5 oz) Picón Bejes-Tresviso blue cheese
200 g (7 oz) mushrooms
1 dl (6 tbsp/4 fl oz) oil
Salt, pepper

Optional:
1 tsp cornstarch

Using a sharp knife, cut horizontally almost through each fillet, then open up and flatten to form one large fillet. Remove any skin and fat. Cut off the base of the mushroom stems, wash quickly, then dry and dice. Remove the rind from the cheese and cut into pieces. Sauté the mushrooms and cheese in half the oil in a non-stick frying pan for 5 minutes. Set aside 2 tbsp of the mixture for the sauce.
Season the chicken fillets then spread with the cheese and mushroom mixture. Roll up and fasten with cocktail sticks. Brown the chicken rolls in a frying pan with the rest of the oil for 2 minutes, then cover and cook over a medium heat for 8 minutes. Remove from the pan and keep warm.

Brown the carcass in the same oil then cover with 0.25 l (2 tbsp/2 fl oz) water. Bring to a boil then reduce the stock to half and strain. Add the reserved filling and blend. If preferred, bind the sauce with a teaspoonful of cornstarch.

Recommended wine:
A young red Garnacha and Tempranillo matured in the bottle (for example, a 1999 vintage) from the D.O. Campo de Borja. The purple-tinged, cherry red wine should bear a very fruity aroma of berries and be powerful but balanced in the mouth, with just a touch of acidity.

Smoked Cheese Ice Cream in a Filo Pastry Flower

Serves 8:

0.5 l (17 fl oz) cream
0.5 l (17 fl oz) milk
100 g (3 1/2 oz) smoked cheese
100 g (3 1/2 oz) unsmoked cheese
400 g (14 oz) cream cheese (e.g. Philadelphia)
4 eggs
400 g (14 oz) sugar

Filo pastry flower:

16 sheets of filo pastry
Butter
Icing sugar

Cut the rind off the two cheeses and bring to a boil with the milk and cream. Blend the cream cheese with the sugar then add the eggs, one by one. Strain the milk and cheese mixture, leave to cool a little then pour over the cream cheese, sugar and egg mixture, stirring all the time to prevent the eggs from curdling. Transfer to the ice cream maker, or make the ice cream in the freezer, stirring the mixture once or twice with a fork during the freezing process. Serve balls of ice cream inside the filo pastry flowers, and drizzle with a little honey.

Filo pastry flowers:

Cut the pastry into 16 round shapes. Brush with butter on both sides and line with two circles in each case the inside of ovenproof bowls or molds. Place a glass or mold inside to prevent the pastry from falling together. Cut the overlapping pastry with scissors to form a fringe, and sprinkle with icing sugar. Bake at 175°C (315°F) for 5-7 minutes or until golden brown.

Recommended wine:

A sweet D.O. Lanzarote made from Malvasía grapes with an appealing, shiny gold color and a refreshing herbal aroma that complements its sweetness. With its fruity flavor and aromatic aftertaste, it makes an ideal partner for this delicate ice cream.

Castilian-style Rack of Beef with Baker's Pótatoes

Serves 6:

3.5 kg (7 lb) rack of Valle del Esla beef ribs
2 cloves garlic
1 dl (6 tbsp/4 fl oz) oil
2 dl (7 fl oz) water
Oil for greasing the dish
Salt, pepper, parsley

Baker's potatoes:

750 g (1 lb 10 oz) potatoes
1 onion
1 dl (6 tbsp/4 fl oz) oil
Salt

Crush the cloves of garlic with the parsley, salt and a little oil in the mortar. Brush some of this mixture over the meat and leave for half an hour. Transfer to a greased oven dish then place in the oven at 180°C (324° F). When hot, mix the water with the rest of the mortar mixture and brush the meat again. Brush several times during roasting until the meat is brown. To prevent the meat juices from burning on the bottom of the pan, add a few spoonfuls of water as required. When the mortar mixture is finished, brush the meat with the pan juices. When cooked–after 2-3 hours–remove the meat from the pan and cut into individual ribs. Add a little water to the pan juices to make a sauce, and serve the hot ribs with baker's potatoes.

Baker's potatoes:

Peel the potatoes, wash and cut into thin slices. Peel the onions and slice finely. Place the potatoes and onions together in an oven dish. Season, drizzle with oil then cover with foil and bake in the oven with the roast meat. After 45 minutes or when cooked, uncover to brown.

Recommended wine:

A red D.O.Ca. Rioja made from Tempranillo and Garnacha, with a dark cherry color and fairly intense toasty aromas, wood and fresh fruit. In the mouth it should be powerful and flavorsome, with well-balanced hints of wood and fruit.

Grilled Sirloin with Four Sauces

Serves 4:
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) Valle del Esla sirloin
Olive oil
Maldon salt

Chive sauce:
1 bundle of chives
1 bundle of parsley
1 dl (6 tbsp/4 fl oz) oil
1 tbsp sugar
1 tbsp mustard
Salt and pepper

Mustard sauce:
2 tbsp grain mustard
4 tbsp mayonnaise
1 tbsp sugar
Salt and pepper

Radish sauce:
1 cup mayonnaise
4 tbsp horseradish sauce or grated horseradish
1 tbsp sugar
Salt

Romesco sauce:
2 cloves garlic
2 dried (or canned) *choricero* peppers
1 ripe tomato
Fresh white bread crumbs
2 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp vinegar
1 small piece of chili pepper
Salt, ground pepper, water

Heat the griddle or a hot stone. Cut the meat into even-sized strips and arrange on a wooden board on the table. Place the hot griddle or stone next to it, with tongs so that each person can cook their meat to taste. Place the different sauces in suitable containers so that each person can dip their meat into the chosen sauce or serve some onto their plates. Also offer a small bowl of Maldon salt and a pepper mill.

Chive sauce:
Blend the chives with the parsley, oil, sugar, mustard, salt and pepper until the texture of a sauce. Check the seasoning.

Mustard sauce:
Mix the grain mustard with the mayonnaise, and add the sugar, salt and pepper.

Horseradish sauce:
Mix the mayonnaise with the horseradish sauce or grated horseradish, add the sugar and taste to check.

Romesco sauce (available from specialist shops):
Crush the cloves of garlic together with the choricero peppers, the skinned and seeded tomato, fresh white bread crumbs (first soak in water and then squeeze), olive oil, vinegar, chili pepper, salt and ground pepper. If this gives a very thick sauce, add a little water.

Recommended wine:
A red crianza D.O. Conca de Barberá, made from a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon with Merlot. A deep red color, with an intense, very ripe fruit aroma reminiscent of blackberry jam. In the mouth, it has structure, balance and a lively, persistent aftertaste.

Carpaccio of Sirloin with Olive Oil, Olives and Flakes of Manchego Cheese

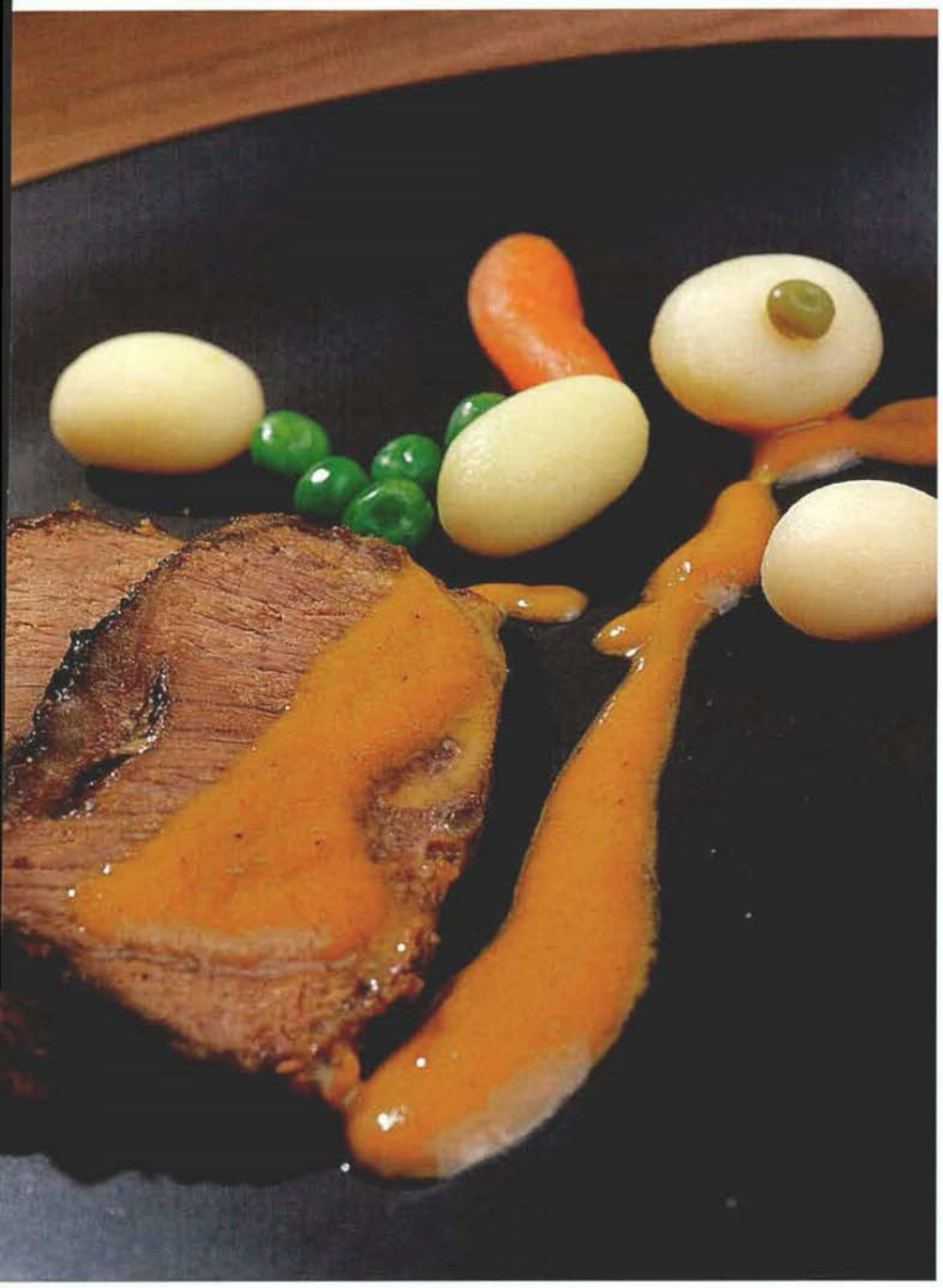
Serves 4:

350 g (12 oz) Valle del Esla rump of beef
1 dl (6 tbsp/4 fl oz) olive oil
50 g (2 oz) cured Manchego cheese
12 black olives
Maldon salt
Freshly-ground black pepper

Freeze the piece of beef for half an hour then slice very thinly by machine. Arrange the slices on the plates and drizzle with the oil. Sprinkle with flakes of Manchego cheese, Maldon salt and freshly-ground black pepper. Chop the olives very finely, sprinkle over the meat and serve.

Recommended wine:

A young red Tinta de Toro (Tempranillo) aged in the bottle (1999) from the D.O. Toro. The color is a purple-tinged, bright cherry-red. In the nose, it should be fruity and in the mouth it should have a full, fleshy texture with vivid tannins. These are played down by the olive oil and the olive garnish.



Valle del Esla Beef Cheek Stew

Serves 4:

1 kg (2 lb 4 oz) cheek of Valle del Esla beef
1 dl (6 tbsp/4 fl oz) D.O. Baena virgin olive oil
1 large onion
1 clove garlic
1 leek
1 green pepper
1 large carrot
1 dl (6 tbsp/4 fl oz) brandy de Jerez
1 dl (6 tbsp/4 fl oz) red wine
4 dl (14 fl oz) stock
Salt, pepper, bay leaf and thyme

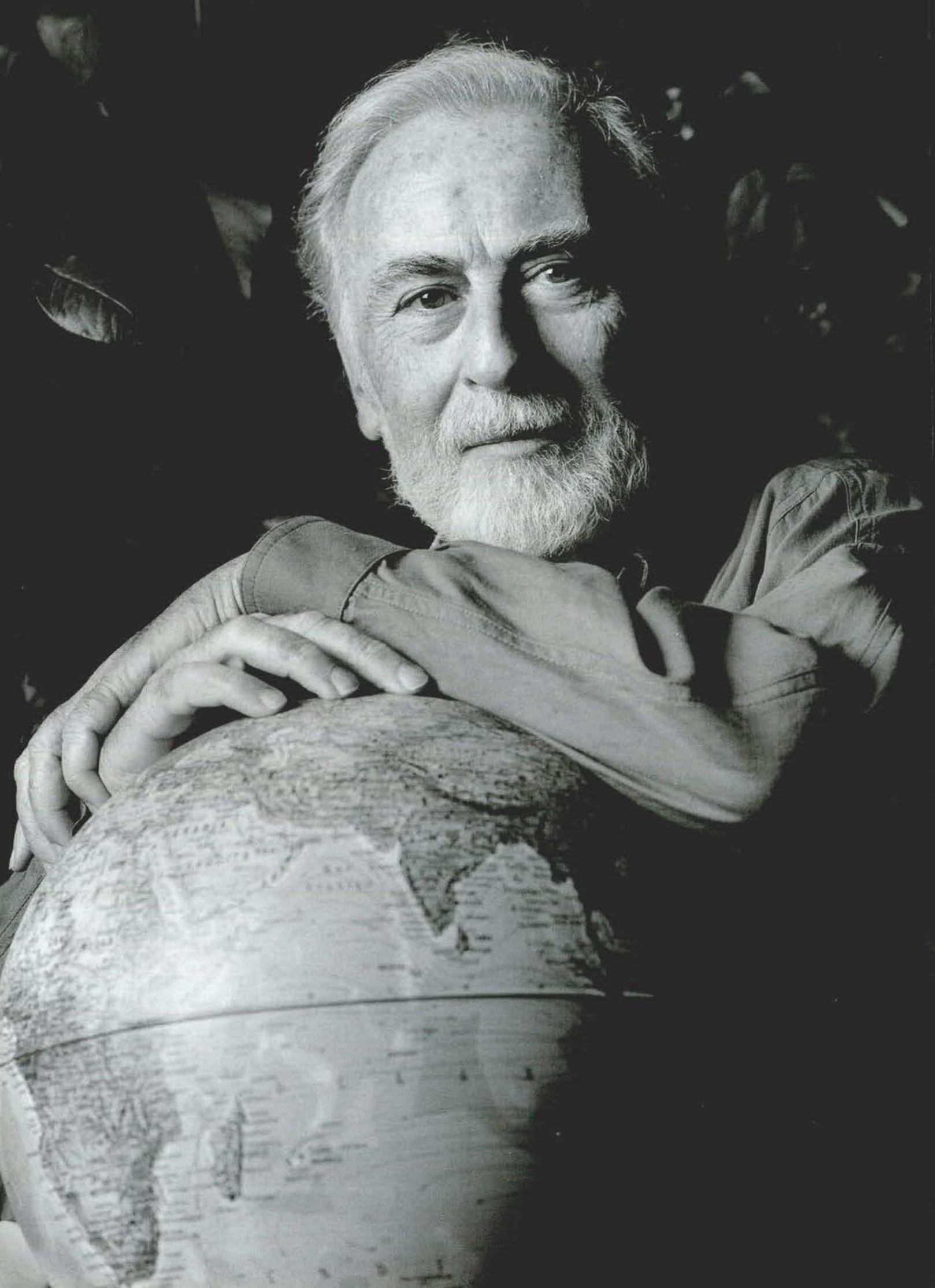
Garnish:

150 g (5 oz) peas
150 g (5 oz) baby carrots
150 g (5 oz) boiled new potatoes

Season the meat, fry in the oil until brown, remove and set aside. In the same oil, fry the onion, garlic, leek, green pepper and chopped carrot until brown. Add the meat, pour over the brandy de Jerez and, when hot, flambé the ingredients. Add the red wine, seasoning, bay leaf and thyme. Pour over the stock, cover and simmer for 2-2 1/2 hours, checking occasionally and adding any condensed steam that collects inside the lid. When the meat is tender, remove and strain the sauce. Return to the pan with the meat, add the cooked garnish and bring to a boil. Serve hot.

Recommended wine:

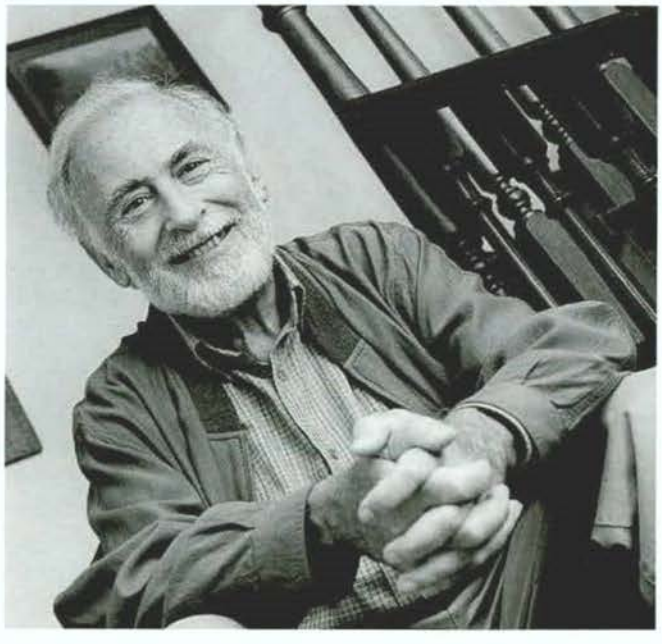
A red crianza from the D.O. Bierzo made from Mencía grapes with their characteristic fruity aroma. A deep cherry-red wine of medium intensity with a fruity flavor that will be a refreshing partner for the rich meat sauce.



Eduardo Martínez de Pisón

A Humanist in the MOUNTAINS

Eduardo Martínez de Pisón is one of Spain's most important scientists. Professor of Physical Geography at Madrid's Autonomous University, his contributions to the study of mountains, glaciers and volcanoes, amongst other subjects, have filled a bibliography that it is impossible to mention here. He has worked all over the world–from the North Pole to the Antarctic, and his work in Spain



won him the National Environment Award in 1991. No ivory-tower researcher, he is a man committed to defending the subject of his studies–mountains, nature, life.

21st-Century Quixotes. Part 5

TEXT
CARLOS TEJERO

TRANSLATION
JENNIFER MCDONALD

PHOTOS
MATIAS COSTA/ICEX

It is always a pleasure to listen to a learned person and Eduardo Martínez de Pisón is certainly learned. But at the same time he is an affable, approachable, jovial person who has the gift of eloquence. He speaks beautifully, choosing his words with care. His rich, flowing vocabulary reveals not only his extensive technical knowledge but also his vast humanistic culture. He is an erudite person, dedicated to passing on his scientific passion to his students but, at the same time, his sensitivity leads him to transmit to others the experiences of his intensely-lived life–as a traveler, mountaineer, dreamer.

What is your utopia, your Quixotic ideal?

If you have a Dulcinea, an ideal, then you can follow it as Don Quixote did. According to my concept of geography, the ideal would be to achieve whatever is best for the scenario of life, for the landscape we live in. We need to arouse people, make them feel grateful to the earth, stop them from sucking it dry. We have to instill in people the idea that we are just passengers on this train, ephemeral inhabitants. We cannot spoil the earth because future generations have to live in it.

Listening to him, you wonder if you are talking to a geographer, a geologist or a poet. What he undoubtedly is, is a lover of Mother Earth. Martínez de Pisón was born 65 years ago in Valladolid in the heart of Castile (which the Spanish poet, Antonio Machado, described as a "sad, noble land, the land of high plains, barren soil and rocky outcrops").

Where does your passion for mountains come from?

My family moved to Aragon when I was an adolescent. From where we lived, you could always feel the presence of Mount Moncayo and the Pyrenees. On an excursion there, I was captivated by their beauty.

That was the start of a passion that was to take him to some of the highest points of the planet. Eduardo was lucky to have an outstanding teacher–Manuel de Terán–one of the most eminent of Spanish geographers, who "encouraged me to take an intellectual interest in geography. I discovered that what I found most attractive in my excursions to the mountains and in contact with nature could be explained by science."

What sort of science is geography?

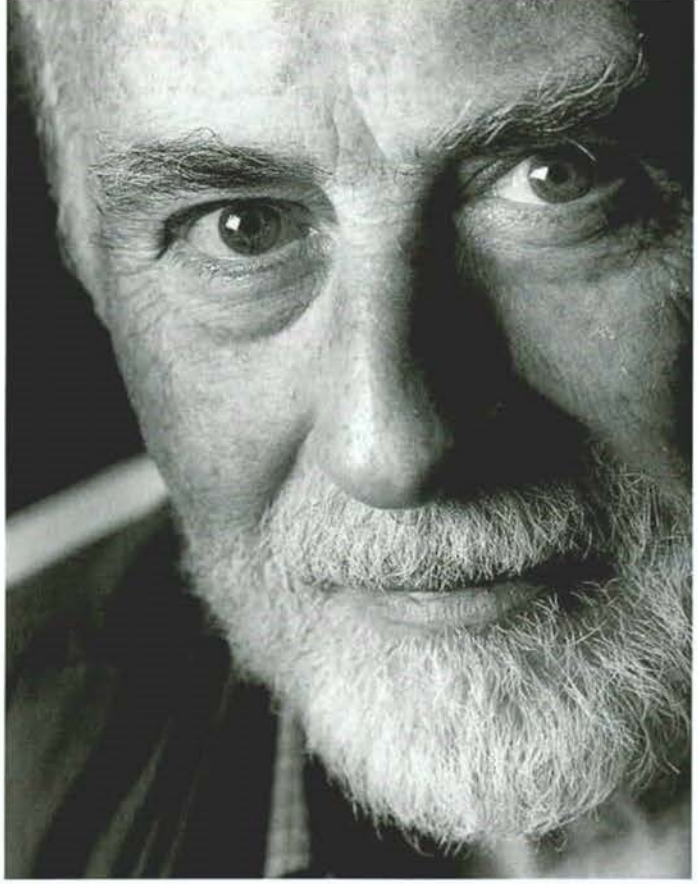
Geography deciphers something that fascinates me–the landscape. But I started out as a mountaineer rather than as a scientist so, when I began to study, I discovered a subject that I already loved. Over the years, by using a method, a tool for scientific knowledge called geography, I was able to channel my interests. In the early years, I focused on rock walls, ridges and summits, but then I took an interest in things that do not require such a close physical relationship with the land. Although I am still interested, I now prefer to measure myself intellectually against the land and its enigmas. I love going out and interrogating the planet.

But do those enigmas really exist? Hasn't everything already been discovered?

There are always new things to discover and you are walking in the footsteps of those who preceded you, or even in your own. In geography, there are places that are well-known and well-trod, and others that have not yet been studied. Just as man used fire long before he had any scientific knowledge about it, man has been in territories without showing any curiosity about them, just using them, traveling over them or destroying them. In fact, scientific exploration can be done without traveling far from home because there is always a rock formation, a plant formation, a type of erosion or whatever that nobody has investigated because they are located in places that are apparently perfectly well-known.

You have mostly studied mountains, glaciers and volcanoes. Do you find the desert dull?

Man-made deserts are absolutely horrific, but natural deserts are magnificent. And there are two types of desert–dry deserts such as the Sahara, and cold deserts such as the Antarctic. They both have their charm, but I think I prefer cold deserts. Someone once said that, instead of calling environmentalists "green," we should call them "brown" because they also have to defend dry, arid terrain. The Gata Cape in Almeria (southern Spain), for example, has fabulous desert landscapes.



Is it possible to read a landscape?

Yes, but landscapes have a language that you have to learn first, and that takes time. Just as it is easier to learn English in an English-speaking country, the language of nature can best be learnt in the mountains. But the classroom is still necessary for establishing a method. Once you reach the level of "interpreter of nature," then landscapes have a lot to say. Landscapes are an open book waiting to be read. I take my students out to the country and teach them to read the meaning of a limestone rock, or of sand. Gradually they learn the alphabet, then they learn to make words and eventually they can read whole pages. A landscape in the Picos de Europa in Asturias will talk of rocks, one in the Cantabrian mountains will talk of beech forests, a landscape with four roads will talk of people. All this needs to be taught so that people can appreciate landscapes and enjoy them. Landscapes are documents that record history–a meadow, a rural road, a cattle track. They all have something to say. If there is nobody to interpret them, this leads to ignorance and, from there, to lack of esteem and, finally, destruction.

Is progress the enemy of landscape?

Not necessarily, because progress is also intellectual and cultural, not only economic. Nobody today would dream of knocking down a cathedral to build a car park. But such a conviction is the fruit of intellectual progress and it must be instilled in people so that it can then be extended to other aspects of the landscape, not only the part that is made up of monuments. Cultural corrections have to be made to the machinery of economic progress to prevent the beautiful things that can be found all over Spain from disappearing–shepherds' cabins, walled meadows, village homes. These are not monuments but they are still worth preserving because they form part of our identity.

Spain is said to have an unusually varied landscape.

Yes. That's true. But the green part of Spain is very small, just a narrow strip, although it is very rich and varied. But that's just it. You can travel just a short distance and find a great range of different landscapes. The Iberian Peninsula is a miniature continent, but the landscape is out of proportion. The area covered with beech forests is tiny in comparison with the plateau. The most common types of landscape in Spain are large valleys (such as those of the Ebro and Guadalquivir rivers), plateaux and coastal areas which are also very varied.

Is there any particular landscape in Spain that you are especially fond of?

I love the Pyrenees in Aragon. I love the landscape and I find the people charming. But I am at ease anywhere: in the Sierra Nevada or the fertile lowlands of Aranjuez. But I haven't been everywhere. Just recently I was in the Redes National Park in Asturias for the first time and found it most impressive. I hope to return.

Is landscape just a physical space, separate from the animals and people that inhabit it?

Landscape is the territory we live our lives in. In his magnificent novel, *The Living Forest,* Wenceslao Fernández Flórez described a wood as an animated space. That's exactly it. There is no such thing as an inanimate space, except perhaps for the Antarctic, but even the Antarctic is animated by the wind, the creaking of the glaciers, the murmur of the torrents and the seals along the coast. The landscape is the scenario in which its animal, plant and human inhabitants act out their lives. It is both the "acrid smell of broom" in the words of Machado, and the peal

of bells. A famous mountaineer once said, "All mountains are great, but they are grandiose if there is a man there to feel it." The adjective "great" describes an objective value–size. "Grandiose" is subjective. It expresses an emotion that cannot be ignored.

Mountains exert such a strong power of seduction that some people are prepared to risk their lives to conquer them.

That's because the beauty of mountains is extreme. Great aesthetic pleasure can be had from looking at them and climbing them. Climbing a mountain is an adventure, an epic exercise, and it is part of human nature to want to feel that sensation. Mountains give an overall life experience because life is as present as death. It is no game. It is not like going skiing then going for a few drinks in the evening. When you face the challenge of a mountain, you are facing the wild planet and beating it fills you with spiritual satisfaction.

What was your worst mountain experience?

It was on the Diran Peak in Pakistan in 1979 when three of my friends disappeared–a photographer, a botanist and a geographer who was a former student of mine doing his doctoral thesis. And it was the first Spanish expedition to the Karakorum. They were in one camp and I was in another. Part of a glacier collapsed and completely smothered the platform they were on. The next day the landscape was so disfigured it was impossible to find the spot where they had been camping. These things are impossible to explain in words because those mountains are massive, with peaks measuring over 7,000 meters (22,965 ft). We were in a very remote spot, very high up and very cold. Getting out of there was hard but what was hardest was losing my colleagues. They are not the only people I have lost in the mountains, but they were the first.

What is the most inhospitable place you have been to?

Greenland, more so than the part of the Antarctic I know. Also the North Pole, but there you have the feeling that somebody may come and find you. In Greenland, there is a never-ending chain of peaks, and impossible ice and fjords, and you can't help thinking you'll never get out alive. You are totally alone, in vast landscapes where man just doesn't count. But, though it is an inhospitable landscape, its inhumanity is magnificent.

Is nature unfair?

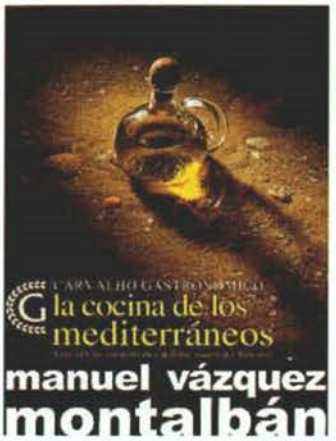
Nature is indifferent and innocent, though to us it may seem cruel. It has its laws and mechanisms that sometimes manifest themselves in the form of catastrophes, but man is just another element of nature. Man likes to dominate, and takes advantage of nature's resources, but man and the planet are not two separate elements. Man is able to live precisely because he forms part of the planet.

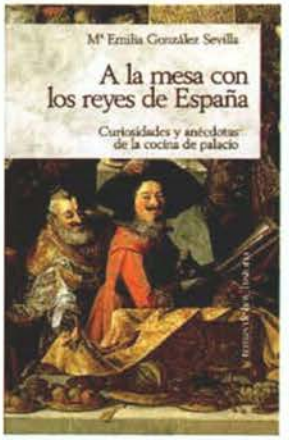
Benjamin Disraeli is reputed to have said, "Travel teaches tolerance." What have you learnt from traveling?

That sentence is true. When you travel, you learn that the world belongs to others, that you are no more than a visitor. When you travel, you discover human qualities that have developed out of different codes to the ones you are used to. My capacity for tolerance and appreciation is not an inherent virtue of mine. It is a reflection of the humanity I have found not only here in Spain but also in remote places for which I can feel nothing but thanks. You have to be very ungrateful not to recognize this, and those of us that live in developed societies are often just that. We live our narrow, mediocre, self-interested lives, forgetting the values that distinguish those splendid people living far away, lost in the valleys of the world.

Carlos Tejero *is a journalist and coordinator for* Spain Gourmetour.

LASTING IMPRESSIONS





Text
Vicky Hayward

Best known outside Spain as the author of the Pepe Carvalho detective novels, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán is equally well known on home ground as a political essayist, food writer and champion of grass-roots cooking. In a new series of ten books, launched earlier this year, he pulls together all the different strands of his work around various different themes related to food and drink.

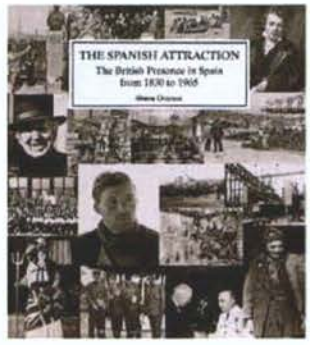
One of the first titles to appear is **La Cocina de los Mediterráneos–Viaje por las Cazuelas de Cataluña, Valencia y Baleares** (The Mediterraneans' Cooking–A Journey through Catalan, Valencian and Balearic Cooking Pots). The subject is one close to Montalbán's heart and stomach–he is himself Catalan–and one can see this in the ground-rules he applies here. One of his guiding principles is that we should not be misled by the recent concept of healthy Mediterranean cooking since it sidelines a wealth of sausages, pork-fat pastries, chocolate dishes and other goodies essential to Spanish Mediterranean gastronomy. As a second general principle, he dismantles each region into its old-fashioned *comarcas*, as defined by physical geography, an approach which makes good sense when looking at local Spanish cooking because each comarca draws on the same shared pool of produce thanks to the shared terrain and microclimate.

The result is a large but practical cookbook. There are over 300 recipes (nearly two-thirds of them from Catalonia) and three introductory essays, one for each region, in which Montalbán traces the key factors that shape the character of each cuisine before running through an inventory of the most important dishes. There are also a good selection of color photos showing how the finished dishes should look–these are unusually authentic. There is one main problem, however: the lack of credits for the recipes themselves, which, particularly in this context, needed their place of origin and source–printed or spoken. (*Ediciones B; www.edicionesb.com*)

A la Mesa con los Reyes de España. Curiosidades y Anécdotas de la Cocina de Palacio (Eating with the Spanish Kings. Curiosities and Anecdotes about Palace Cooking). This is a new edition of a chatty and highly readable book which is popular rather than serious history–there is no attempt to delve into any of the extensive primary sources on the Spanish royal households–but it includes all kinds of interesting snippets which suggest that royal eating habits have evolved from conspicuous consumption towards a more rationally balanced approach and that alongside that the monarchs and their families have also always found ways to eat what they want behind the scenes. (Ediciones Temas de Hoy S.A.; www.temashoy.es)

La Cocina de las Monjas (The Nuns' Cooking) is a handy new edition of a book first printed thirteen years ago. Since then, recipe collections from Spanish convents have enjoyed a publishing boom after proving to be best-sellers. Exactly why this should be so is still unclear–it may be the homeliness of the food or the fascination of what goes on behind closed doors–but in any case this collection of recipes by Luis San Valentín is appropriately sober, frugal and plainly presented with a hundred recipes, all from convents in Burgos province, in Castile León. From a cook's point of view, some of the best recipes are for produce from the kitchen-garden such as artichokes, potatoes and cauliflower. For this new edition all the recipes have been tested and given accurate quantities. There is also a brief historical backdrop on each convent, which helps to conjure up the life of these cooks who live and work behind closed doors. (*Alianza Editorial S.A.; www.alianzaeditorial.es*)

It is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words. In **The Spanish Attraction–The British Presence in Spain from 1830 to 1965**, Simon Grayson, an English film and photography researcher, has pulled together 80 little-seen black and white photographs that show the life and times of the British who came to



Spain. The book includes many famous figures–Richard Ford, Queen Victoria Eugenia, George Orwell and Robert Graves, for example–but more interesting, perhaps, are those hidden corners of history that often come to light only thanks to photographic archives. Here are images of anonymous engineers, railway builders, businessmen and even footballers who were residents of British commercial outposts between Tenerife and Bilbao. The oldest of these communities is, as Grayson points out, that of Jerez, where the artistocratic wine families are distinguished by a rare degree of integration into local culture and life. A well-researched text outlines the stories behind the photos. An excellent book for its realistic view, counterbalancing the often romanticized idea of the British presence in Spain. (*Ediciones Santanta S.L.; santana@vnet.es*)

In Brief

HOME COOKING

Cocina Charra (Charra Cooking) takes us to the rolling hills and plains on either side of the River Tormes as it flows through the city of Salamanca towards the Portuguese frontier. This is classic old Castile with bull-rearing ranches and Iberian pigs grazing among holm-oaks. The authors, Elisa Núñez Mateos and Arturo González Martín, have done a really good job in catching the sober, meat-based character and medieval peculiarities of this little-covered cuisine, not only in the recipes and their unusual spicing but also in a wry introductory A-Z covering everything from lentils to hunger (and 65 local verbs for cooking). Literary quotes accompany the recipes too. A book with plenty of lingering flavor. (*Alianza Editorial S.A.; www.alianzaeditorial.es*)

Cantabria Gastronómica. Su cocina, de Pueblo en Pueblo (Gastronomic Cantabria. Its Cooking, from Village to Village). Written as a visitors' guide, this food-lovers' portrait of 102 Cantabrian villages describes each one through a brief general text and two recipes. The author, José Antonio Esteban Torres, chef of the Hotel Altamira in Santillana del Mar, is a professional chef, but has collected most of the recipes from home-cooking sources. They offer a great mix of authentic coastal and mountain cooking from this small northern region. Spring vegetables with clams, red beans with squid, stewed venison, cheese toasts with thyme and honey, cabbage with rice and summer fruit compote cooked in grape juice are examples. A good source book for a little-known region. (*Gráficas Imgrafi; www.elcandelario.com*)

FOODS

Foie Gras. This lovingly produced bilingual Basque and Spanish edition of an old French text by Jacques Saint Germain is the first "*cuaderno*," or gastronomic notebook, of a series published under the editorial eye of Michelin-starred restaurant Mugaritz's young chef Andoni Luis Aduriz (see interview in *Spain Gourmetour* No. 53). Although Saint Germain's eminently readable treatise on the history and evolution of foie gras remains essentially French, this edition is a happy reflection of the exploratory depth behind young Spanish professional cooking. The recipes, by the way, are wonderful. (*Editorial Aurrera S.L.; ediaurrera@euskalnet.net*)

El Champiñón y Setas de Castilla-La Mancha (The Mushroom and Cultivated Fungi of Castile La Mancha). This promotional book brings together various short essays on the history and growing techniques of cultivated mushrooms, which have become one of La Mancha's key crops in the last forty years. Then come 35 recipes culled from chefs' and mycologists' entries in the annual Gastrochampi competition for mushroom cooking organized by the growers' association. Most of these are remarkably complex restaurant dishes ranging from an elegant Basque tapa in a cocktail glass to a sweet mushroom ice cream–but there are also a few simpler dishes with local flavor, such as mushrooms stuffed with partridge. (*Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha; www.jccm.es*)

WINE

Nuestros Mejores Vinos. La Guía (MMII) (Our Best Wines. The Guide. 2002). Yet another wine guide, one thinks at first glance–but this one is genuinely different. There are no points or marks given for quality, there are no maps, there is no wine advertising and the book is designed as a very compact, boxed, bright red hardback rather than a weighty paperback. Most important of all, the guide is the result of independent wine-sellers' and sommeliers' tastings for their own professional purposes, with simple and elegantly written comments for each of their 600 chosen wines. One of the tasters is Custodio Zamarra, legendary sommelier of Zalacaín, Spain's first three-star Michelin restaurant. The result is a highly readable guide with a classic look but a modern feel–and eleven useful indexes providing different short-cuts through the guide. Recommended. (*TodoVino The Spain Wine Shop S.L.; guia@todovino.com*)

RESTAURANT GUIDES

Comer en torno a Madrid (Eating Around Madrid). This small paperback guide fills a useful gap by zoning in on restaurants easily reached during day or weekend trips from Madrid. There are over 400 restaurants listed, ranging from those which make regular appearances in other guides to humbler eateries which may be less well known except to locals, but nonetheless offer good popular cooking. A three-tier star system indicates quality. (*El Pais Aguilar; www.elpais-aguilar.es*)

La Guía de Nicolás (Nicolas' Guide). This is the first edition of a restaurant guide based on readers' comments–apparently 5,000 of them–although it lacks its own inspection system to balance that with a coherent, unified view of quality. So the strongest point of this guide is not, perhaps, its comments on cuisine, but it does have a very useful cross-indexing system based on price, city zone, type of cooking, specialties, opening hours, reservations policy, open-air eating and live shows. (*Maxipress Comunicación S.A.; info@maxipress.net*)

TRAVEL

Balnearios con Encanto (Spas with Charm). The third edition of this guide has been expanded to include the new wave of spas that are appearing around Spain (there are 61 here) and it also now gives a detailed breakdown of the types of water therapy offered by each spa. The photos can help you choose between state-of-the-art hi-tech luxury or historic atmosphere–both are available, with a great range of prices. (*El Pais Aguilar; www.elpais-aguilar.es*)

Castillos con Encanto (Castles with Charm). Spain is one of Europe's great castle territories thanks to the Reconquest. This new guide presents a small selection from the hundreds dotted around the country–just

Spanish Kitchen Confidential

This biography of rapidly rising Catalan star-chef Sergi Arola, rounded out by a selection of his recipes, is perhaps the closest one can come to a real-life tale of rock-and-roll meeting Michelin-starred cuisine. The title, *Como Quieras, Cuando Quieras, Donde Quieras* (Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere), says a lot in itself–it comes from a classic song by The Who, the British sixties band whose songs combined working-class rebelliousness with native wit, as in the immortal lyric, "I was born with a plastic spoon in my mouth." A good motto for Arola himself who, it turns out, learned to eat well as a child with his granddad, turned to rock as a restless teenager and became a mod in Barcelona. Finally, after the break-up of his group The Kangeroos, he decided to throw himself into haute cuisine, guided by his grandfather's words that it didn't matter what he did in life provided he tried to be the best in his field. After working with Pierre Gagnaire in Paris, he spent time with Ferran Adrià at El Bulli–deejaying after-hours in the nearby town–and then seized the chance of running his own show at La Broche, a small restaurant in uptown Madrid. The risk paid off and the rest is history: La Broche, now in sleek minimalist premises, has two Michelin stars. One reason this book works well is its cinematic quality, with snappy writing by film writer David Trueba, who manages to convey the fizz and kick of life in the kitchen, and the oblique black and white reportage shots by Albert Bertran. Another reason the book appeals is that Arola so clearly acknowledges his debt to others and refuses to be drawn into pretentious culinary analysis. You're left to read between the lines of various kitchen conversations and to take the 42 recipes that make up the second half of the book on their own merit. There are fashionable foams and emulsions, but there are also fearlessly simple dishes such as steamed rock mussels or salted anchovies bathed in olive oil. Likewise there are unexpected creations like a sweet pumpkin carpaccio and old-fashioned Catalan squid with meatballs. And finally the book works because one senses this is the beginning of a much longer story–Arola's sheer energy virtually leaps off the page. As the magazine goes to press he is just opening a second venture in Miami.

Como Quieras, Cuando Quieras, Donde Quieras. En la Cocina de Sergi Arola. Text by David Trueba, photos by Alberto Beltran. Recipes from La Broche. *(RBA Libros, S.A.; www.rbalibros.es)*

fifty, chosen with an eye for their architectural interest and the beauty of their setting. As a result you may find some of the best known castles do not appear here, especially those converted into hotels, but this has allowed space to include others which are off the beaten track. (*El País Aguilar; www.elpais-aguilar.es*)

Guía de Espacios Naturales. Andalucía (Guide to Natural Spaces. Andalusia). The interest of this series–this is the third book published, with the first two covering Catalonia and Galicia–lies in the texts on the less well-known, smaller protected areas of countryside that are not as established as the large natural parks. This is especially true of Andalusia, where 17 percent of the land area is protected in some way, although the text is perhaps not quite as informed as that of the other books. (*El País Aguilar; www.elpais-aguilar.es*)

Guía Total. Pirineo Catalán (Complete Guide. The Catalan Pyrenees). This is, indeed, an admirably complete guide for those who want to go walking, cycling or simply driving around the eastern Pyrenees. In-depth general essays preface a selection of walking and driving routes–with maps to accompany them–and a listing of the sights in towns and villages, and the book ends with practical information on accommodation, shopping, eating and nightlife. Essential reading for travelers to an area that is not otherwise well covered in guides. (*Grupo Anaya S.A.; www.anaya.es*)

Guía Viva. Comer y Dormir en España (Live Guide. Eating and Sleeping in Spain). The accommodation and eating places listed here have been picked for value rather than simply for cheapness. In this sense it gives a surprisingly good spread of economic places to stay as you travel and it also covers everyday restaurants where locals usually eat–often some of the best kitchens, too. A large team of researchers has guaranteed comprehensive coverage of the country although the information on sights is just a quick résumé–you would need a separate guidebook to cover them. (*Grupo Anaya S.A.; www.anaya.es*)

FOODIE'S CORNER

Conferences, fairs, new restaurants, awards, star chefs, ... the food world is buzzing just about everywhere, Spain included. This section aims to reflect what's going on within Spain itself and events relevant to Spain elsewhere in the world.

Madrid Fusión is the name of the First International Gastronomy Meeting to be held in the Spanish capital on 21, 22 and 23 January 2003. Master demonstrations will be given by some of the world's greatest chefs, such as **Luisa Valazza** (Italy), **Michel Bras** (France), **Heinz Winkler** (Germany), **Tetsuya Wakuda** (Japan), **Charlie Trotter** (United States) and **Ferran Adrià** (Spain). Some of Spain's most renowned chefs will also be participating **(Carme Ruscalleda, Juan Mari Arzak, Santi Santamaría, Martín Berasategui, Pedro Subijana, Sergi Arola, Manuel de la Osa,** etc.). The organizers hope Madrid Fusión will be "a magical place where gastronomes can get to know the most up-to-date culinary techniques and the very latest creations resulting from today's culture mix and changing eating habits in the world's most developed societies." Talks and tasting sessions will also be on the program.
www.madridfusion.net

Culture

This Foundation was set up four years ago with a view to protecting and disseminating the cultural heritage of San Millán de la Cogolla, a small town in the Rioja region. Not only is this the location of the Benedictine monasteries of Suso and Yuso (from the Latin for "Upper" and "Lower"), but it is also considered the cradle of the Castilian language. It was here that the monk Gonzalo de Berceo wrote his famous verse in the 13th century:

Quiero fer una prosa en roman paladino
en cual suele el pueblo fablar a su vecino
ca non son tan letrado por fer otro latino
bien valdra como creo un vaso de bon vino.

A loose, modern-day translation might read as follows:

I want to write in plain language
The language that ordinary people use
I don't know how to write in Latin
But still I think I deserve a glass of good wine.

Text
Carlos Tejero

The new portal offers a wide range of topics related to Spanish language and literature and the history of the monasteries but, most importantly, it provides access to some of the most valuable books in the Yuso monastery library. So far, however, only 150 of a total of 11,000 volumes are available on line.
www.fsanmillan.es

Wine

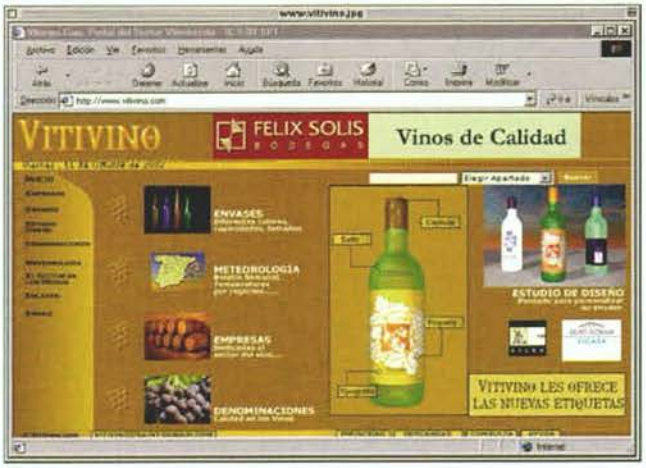
Somontano is growing. **Bodegas y Viñedos Olvena** and **Bodegas Sierra de Guara** are the latest wineries to join the D.O. Somontano (see Glossary on page 135). This D.O. (in Huesca, northern Spain) was set up in 1984 and quickly earned itself a reputation for producing quality wines characterized–at least the reds–by the personality of the Moristel grape, a Spanish native variety. Bodegas y Viñedos Olvena is based in Barbastro, capital of the Somontano district. It has invested about six million euros just in building its winery. Bodegas Sierra de Guara, after an investment of three million euros, plans to begin selling its wines early next year. One of the region's most emblematic wineries, **Bodegas Enate**, has presented Merlot-Merlot 2000, a wine that clearly expresses varietal characteristics. According to the producers, "It combines the strength of '99 with the charm of '98" (the latter was a prizewinner in the International Wine and Spirit Competition of London). The vinification process allowed the fermenting grape juices at 30°C (86°F) to soak with the skins for one month. This was followed by malolactic fermentation in new French oak barrels, and the resulting wine was then aged in the bottle for 16 months. The label bears an original design for Enate by artist Frederic Amat.
www.dosomontano.com
www.enate.es

Vitivino is the name of a new portal set up by a group of enthusiasts from the Spanish province of Álava in the Basque Country with the idea of promoting Spanish wines and wine culture. It offers, amongst other services, a winery search and a Denomination of Origin search, wine sector news, weather information and links. But the most unusual, innovative feature is its Design Studio in which users can produce a virtual design of their wine bottles. It comprises a number of tools for choosing the type of bottle (Bordeaux, Burgundy, Rhine, etc.), capsule color, label shape and even the type of print to be used. The program then shows a three-dimensional model of the design. This Web site is only available in Spanish.
www.vitivino.com

Santuario, a new Toro red. The **Toro Designation of Origin** is enjoying a period of glory. Important bodegas from other parts of Spain have been investing in this region because of its potential for producing red wines. One such is the Caballero group–well-known for its sherries and sherry brandies–which has been casting its business net outside El Puerto de Santa María (Cádiz) in other wine-producing areas such as Rioja, Rueda and Toro. After setting up the Marqués de Irún winery in San Román de Hornija (Valladolid, northwest Spain), it has now brought out its Santuario wine, a '99 Crianza, made exclusively from Tempranillo grapes (known in this part of Spain as Tinta de Toro). The wine was aged in new American oak barrels for eight months, then for twelve more in the bottle. A company spokesman stated, "Harvesting took place early in the morning, as fresh grapes are less likely to lead to unwanted fermentation and they increase the polyphenol level because of prior natural maceration."

Bodegas Terras Gauda is entering **El Bierzo.** This renowned company from the D.O. Rías Baixas (in Galicia, northwest Spain) has purchased the Pittacum winery in the neighboring D.O. Bierzo (in León, also in northwest Spain). The Galician company, which paid out 1.2 million euros, explained, "This was not just a financial operation. We took our decision because the Pittacum wines have personality and quality, and are produced by a team that is dedicated to enhancing the wine-growing tradition of El Bierzo, avoiding industrialized production." The Bierzo bodega has six hectares (15 acres) of vineyards over 50 years old growing Mencía grapes.
www.terrasgauda.com

Castillo Perelada, one of Spain's most attractive bodegas to visit, located in the Ampurdán Denomination of Origin (in Girona, northeast Spain), has presented its new range–Castillo Perelada Ex Ex–in which the wines, instead of receiving a name, are given a number, that of their order of arrival on the market. The idea is to create exclusive wines having unique personalities because they come from vineyards on different soils, growing different varieties under different



conditions, etc. The wines are produced in a special winery in which "mini-vinification processes" take into account all the different growth parameters. The owners decided on starting a new range because these wines do not fit into the traditional categories of *Crianza* or *Reserva* (see Glossary on page 135), which are for more standard products. The first wine, obviously, is the **Ex Ex 1,** a '98 vintage. It is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Garnacha fermented individually at 24°C (75°F) and aged in French oak barrels for 24 months before blending. This is a powerful wine, with a high alcohol content (15.5%) but, according to the bodega, "it is perfectly balanced, with a deep cherry color, great aromatic complexity and a long aftertaste." Only 3,511 bottles were produced. These were carefully labeled and individually packed in wooden boxes, as befits the specialness of this new wine.
www.perelada.com

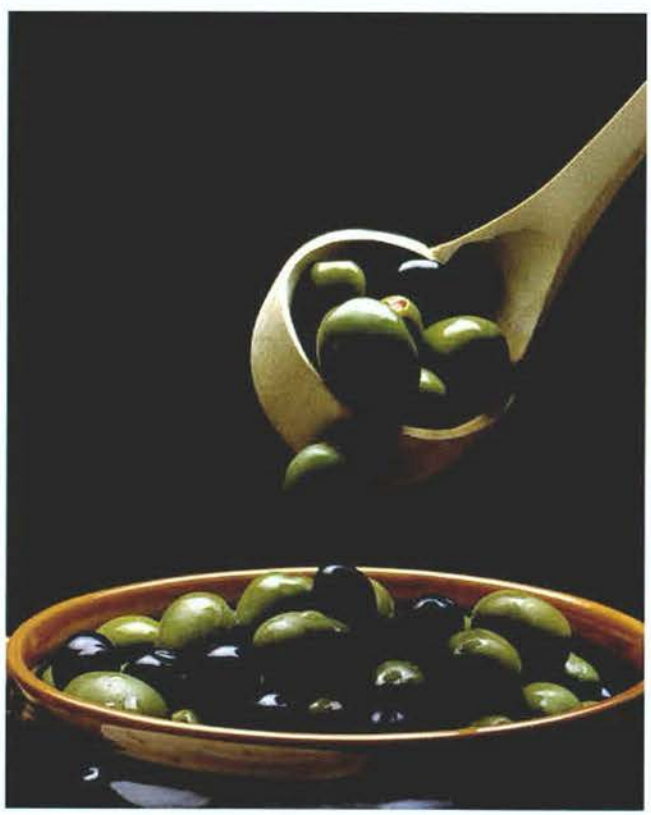
Wanted. **An electronic nose.** This is the quest of researchers in the condensed matter physics department at the University of Valladolid. In collaboration with the enological centers in Castile-León and La Rioja, they are working on the Wine Panel Test to find an electronic instrument able to carry out full organoleptic analysis of wine in the same way that a human can. "The idea is not to replace tasters," says José Antonio Saja, director of the research department. "It is to find a tool that will help and complement the work of the expert who will always have to decide on how the product should be used." The project involves the participation of three Spanish wineries, two French ones and two Portuguese ones, as well as an Italian winemaking equipment manufacturer.
http://caos.eis.uva.es

Núria '99 is the new **organic wine** placed on the market by the Catalonian winery Albet i Noya. Named after Núria Noya, the mother of the owners, Josep María and Antoni, it is a red from a blend hitherto unknown in Spain–Merlot as the main variety, with Petit Syrah and Caladoc (a cross between Malbec and Garnacha). Neither clarified nor stabilized, the wine is aged in Allier oak barrels for twelve months. The bodega belongs to the D.O. Penedès (in Catalonia, in northeastern Spain) and is a pioneer in Spain in the production of organic wines. This family-owned business, which had been producing wine since the turn of the century, produced its first organic wine in 1980 (for a Danish importer) and has been doing so ever since, under the leadership of Josep María, who defines himself as an enthusiastic vegetarian. Today all their products are organic, falling under the control of the Catalonian Council for Organic Agricultural Production.
www.albetinoya.com

We all know **Spain has a long winemaking tradition,** but just how long exactly? No agreement has yet been reached on this. The Pintia Project research team at Valladolid University's Centro de Estudios Vacceos "Federico de Wattenberg" have found the first signs of wine consumption in the interior of the Iberian Peninsula, in the province of Valladolid. According to studies carried out on the remains of the ancient town of Pintia, near Peñafiel, the Vaccean tribe that lived in pre-Roman times around the Duero river used to drink wine at funeral banquets, as well as beer and mead. This was proved by Professor Jordi Juan Treserras who analyzed the remains of glasses found in two Vaccean tombs. However, it seems that wine existed long before that in the area of Jerez because two grape presses have been found in the Phoenician remains at Castillo de Doña Blanca which date from the 7th century B.C. This would confirm the statement made by the Greek geographer, Strabo (1st century B.C.), in his *"Geographica"* (Book III) that the first vines had been introduced to Jerez by the Phoenicians 1,100 years before the birth of Christ.
www.fyl.uva.es/personal/pintia
www.sherry.org/crvhis01.html

Food

The 14 producers of **Campo Real table olives** are looking for endorsement of their products. They have applied for recognition as a *Denominación Específica* (D.E.–see Glossary on page 135) or, to use the E.U. term, the Protected Geographic Indication. The olives from Campo Real in the province of Madrid are of the Manzanilla variety and are flavored with thyme, fennel, oregano and garlic. They are hand picked in the month of October and carefully selected to ensure that there are no more than 240 units per kilo. They are then split, washed in water for three or four days to remove any bitter flavor, then dressed. By December, when they have turned brown, they are considered ready to eat. According to the Campo Real producers, their product has plenty of export potential but they first need to solve the problem of its limited keeping quality. The National Institute for Agri-



food Research is currently carrying out research to improve preservation so that the olives will keep their original texture and color for more than six months, without the use of preservatives.

Spanish fruit in Central America. Since the middle of the year 2002, the markets of Costa Rica and Guatemala have been offering fresh Spanish fruit such as grapes, apples, peaches, pears, nectarines, plums and cherries. Previously, the authorities of these countries had refused import permits for Spanish fruits, on health and hygiene grounds. According to the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing and Food, the Spanish fruit will be welcomed because, in spite of its high retail prices, it is considered "sweeter" than fruit from the U.S. or Chile. The Ministry's next goal is to extend the range of products to include citrus fruits and vegetables. www.mapya.es

Chupa Chups is to invest 19.7 million euros in modernizing its Russian plants. This Spanish multinational, the world's largest seller of lollipops, expects to increase the production capacity of its three factories in St. Petersburg, developing new products and increasing its distribution network. "Not only does Chupa Chups lead the lollipop market with a 90 percent share," says its president, Xabier Bernat, "but we also produce and distribute confectionery through our subsidiaries Zao Chock & Rolls (industrial cakes) and Zao Chupa Chups Kent (chewing gum and soft sweets)." Founded in 1958 by Enric Bernat, this company has production facilities not only in Spain and Russia but also in France, Mexico, Brazil and China. In 2001, its sales exceeded 400 million euros, of which 91 percent were exports. www.chupachups.com

Spain is Europe's **fourth largest producer of natural and mineral water** with a total of 3,846 million liters (876 million gallons) packed in 2001. Italy leads the market with 8,752 million liters (1,925 million gallons), followed by Germany and France. Spain's growth, however, was the fastest, 11.1 percent up on the previous year. The statistics also state that, while Germany packs all its natural water in glass bottles, the Italian, French and Spanish producers prefer plastic materials. www.aneabe.com

The Murcian ***chato,*** a black breed of pig, of which only 65 specimens survived in 1999, seems to be recovering from the threat of extinction. This is thanks to the Integrated Center for Agricultural Training and Experimentation (CIFEA) and the Murcian Center for Agricultural Research and Development (CIDA). In the last few years, these two institutions have managed to cross chato pigs with Ibérico and Yorkshire breeds, giving rise to some pure Murcian chatos. The Murcian breed was common in the southeast of Spain during the first half of the 20th century but was gradually re-

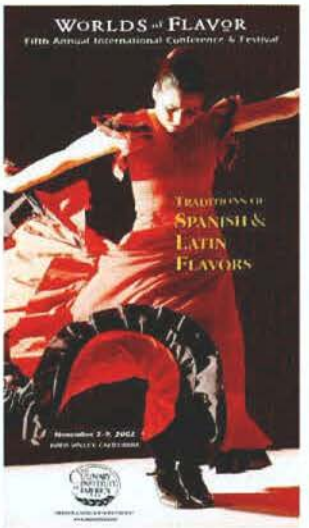
placed by others that could be fattened faster so were cheaper to raise. The Murcian chato can grow up to 250 kg (113.4 pounds) in weight and 85 cm (25.9 feet) in height. Chato products were presented during the Spanish National Pig-Farming Week held in Lorca (Murcia in the southeast of Spain) last September.
www.uco.es/organiza/departamentos/genetica/serga/chato.htm

Abroad

Spain was the protagonist at the The Culinary Institute of America's **Worlds of Flavor** meeting held in Napa Valley (California, USA) from 7 to 9 November. The event included talks and demonstrations by Spanish experts and chefs including Quim Marqués (from the Barcelona restaurant Suguet de l'Amirall), Teodoro Biurrun (from the Pilar d'en Doro restaurant in Menorca), Mariano Aznar (from the Solera restaurant in New York), Daniel Olivella (from the B-44 Catalonian restaurant in San Francisco, California) and María José Sevilla who is in charge of Foods from Spain in London (a center for the promotion of Spanish agrifood products).
www.prochef.com

Awards

Cristóbal Halffter, the Spanish composer and orchestral conductor, has received the Rioja 2002 Prestige Award. This is granted by the D.O.Ca. Rioja Regulating Council to "outstanding persons who, through their respective professional activities, help to exalt and maintain the values and customs of peoples with a wine-growing tradition." The jury stated that Halffter was "a composer charged with inspiration, love and the need to express himself and, at the same time, a connoisseur and



lover of wine and wine culture, as shown by the fact that one of his hobbies is the cultivation of his own beautiful vineyard." In his speech, the composer drew comparisons between wine and music. "Both are the fruit of man's acting on nature in his search for work well done, and both are created to be enjoyed in friendship and in company." Halffter called for an alternative society, "One that is not based solely on material goods. Music and wine, sounds and flavors, looking for what is exquisite in both of these fields could be a good start for creating a new utopia." Born in 1930, this Madrid musician has now joined the ranks of Camilo José Cela (Nobel prizewinner for Literature), Mario Vargas Llosa, Eduardo Chillida and Plácido Domingo who received this award in previous editions.

Andalusia has traditionally produced some of Spain's best olive oils. This was confirmed in the awards for the **Best Spanish Extra Virgin Olive Oils, Crop Year 2001-2002**, which are granted every year by the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing and Food. In the category for "Green, bitter fruity," the award went to Olivarera San José de Lora (Estepa, Seville); for "Green, sweet fruity" to the Cooperativa Nuestra Señora de la Oliva (Gibraleón, Huelva) and for "Ripe fruity" to Muñoz Vera e Hijos (Cabra, Córdoba). 130 samples were subjected first to physical and chemical analyses, then to assessment by the Ministry's official tasting panel. The jury stressed the high quality of the oils presented to the awards because 66 of the samples obtained the score of 8 that was required to reach the final.
www.mapya.es

Success was also enjoyed by the **ARAEX** export consortium (Rioja Alavesa Export Group). This group of nine small, family-run bodegas was declared the **Best Spanish Food Company in 2001** by the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing and Food, in the export category. Javier Ruiz Galarreta, manager of the consortium which acts as a common export department for all nine firms, explained its achievement. "Our specialization and the efforts made to internationalize our wines, as well as our capacity to pool the interests of different companies for the purpose of promotion abroad, have turned us into an example for many Spanish companies." ARAEX was set up in 1993, with the support of the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEX), and Galarreta remembered, "Our goal was to join forces to get round the lack of resources that prevented companies from exporting individually. Since then, some of our members have tripled their production thanks to their exports." Nine years later, ARAEX now exports 70 percent of its Crianza, Reserva and Gran Reserva wines. An example to follow.
www.araex.com

Lucio del Campo, from the Mesón La Cueva de San Esteban (Segovia, in central Spain), has won the Montecillo Golden Nose award. This makes him Spanish Wine Waiter of the Year. Runners-up were Rafael Pérez from Valencia and Pere Palmada from Catalonia, who came second and third respectively. Candidates were required to state the characteristics of a wine served in an opaque glass, using nothing but their nose. Although five hundred wine waiters from all over Spain entered the competition, only seven reached the finals. The winner received a gold wine goblet designed by the famous Spanish painter and sculptor, Antonio López. On the same occasion, the contestants also carried out a blind tasting session to choose what they considered to be the best Spanish wines. The results for sparkling wines were Cuvée D.S. '97 by Freixenet (D.O. Penedès); for white wines, Enate 2001 (D.O. Somontano); for rosés, Señorío de Sarría (D.O. Navarre); for young reds, Palacio Remondo 2000 (D.O.Ca. Rioja); for fortified wines, an Amontillado by Garvey (D.O. Jerez); and, for sweet wines, Pedro Ximénez Viejo by Osborne (D.O. Jerez).

Spain Gourmetour has been awarded the Prize Marqués de Busianos 2002, by the Spanish Academy of Gastronomy and the *Cofradía de la Buena Mesa* (Guild of Fine Dining) for the promotion of Spanish cuisine around world. This is the second time our magazine received an award from this organization. The first was in 1988, when it received the Special Prize for Gastronomy. Also honored this year were, among others: Andoni Luis Aduriz (Mugaritz Restaurant), in the category of Best Chef; Luis Miguel Martín (El Sumiller Restaurant), in the category of Best Sommelier; the book *El Sueño de Pedro Subijana* (Pedro Subijana's Dream), published by Editorial Everest, in the category of Best Publication; the Estación de Viticultura y Enología de Navarra (EVENA), in the category of Best Scientist in the Area of Food and Nutrition; Restaurante Sant Pau (owned by Carme Ruscalleda), for Best Menu Design; Abraham García (Viridiana Restaurant), with the Gastronomic Celebrity award. Spain Gourmetour has been published since 1986 by the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEX), promoting of food and wines from Spain, as well as its gastronomy and culture. The magazine is published every four months in four languages: English, French, German and Spanish. Next year, an online version will be also available on the Internet.
www.spaingourmetour.com

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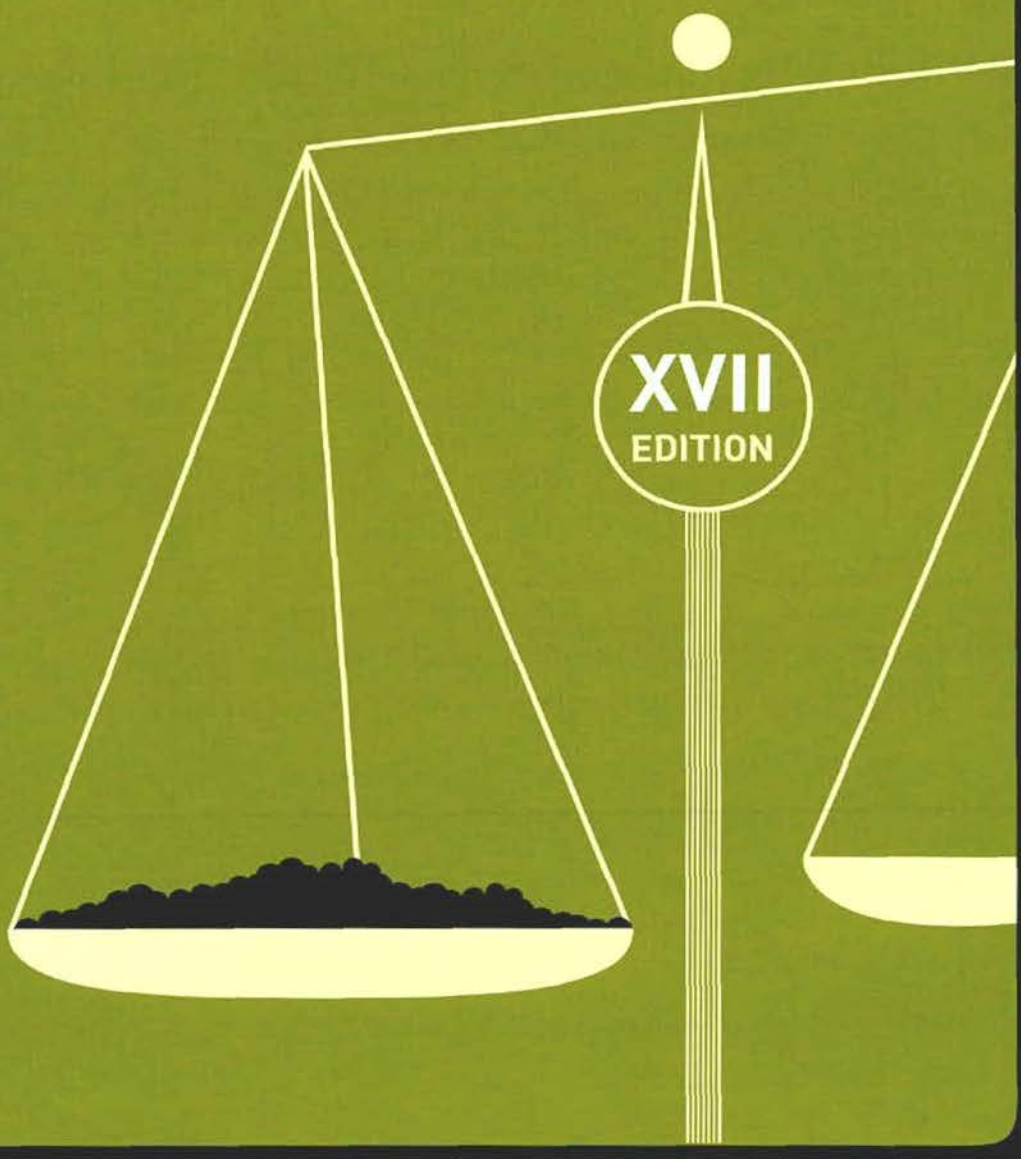

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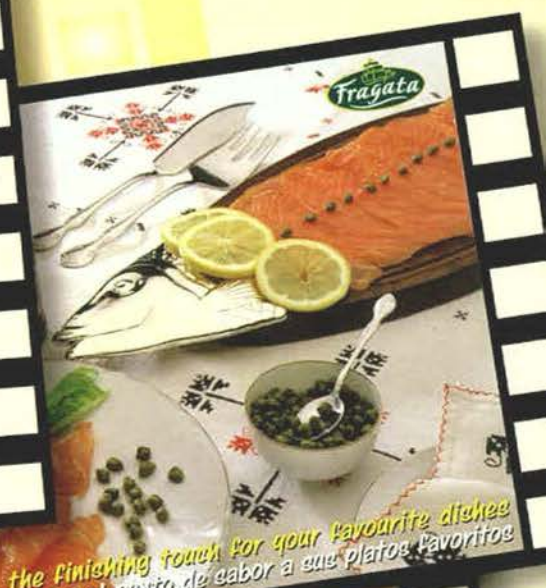

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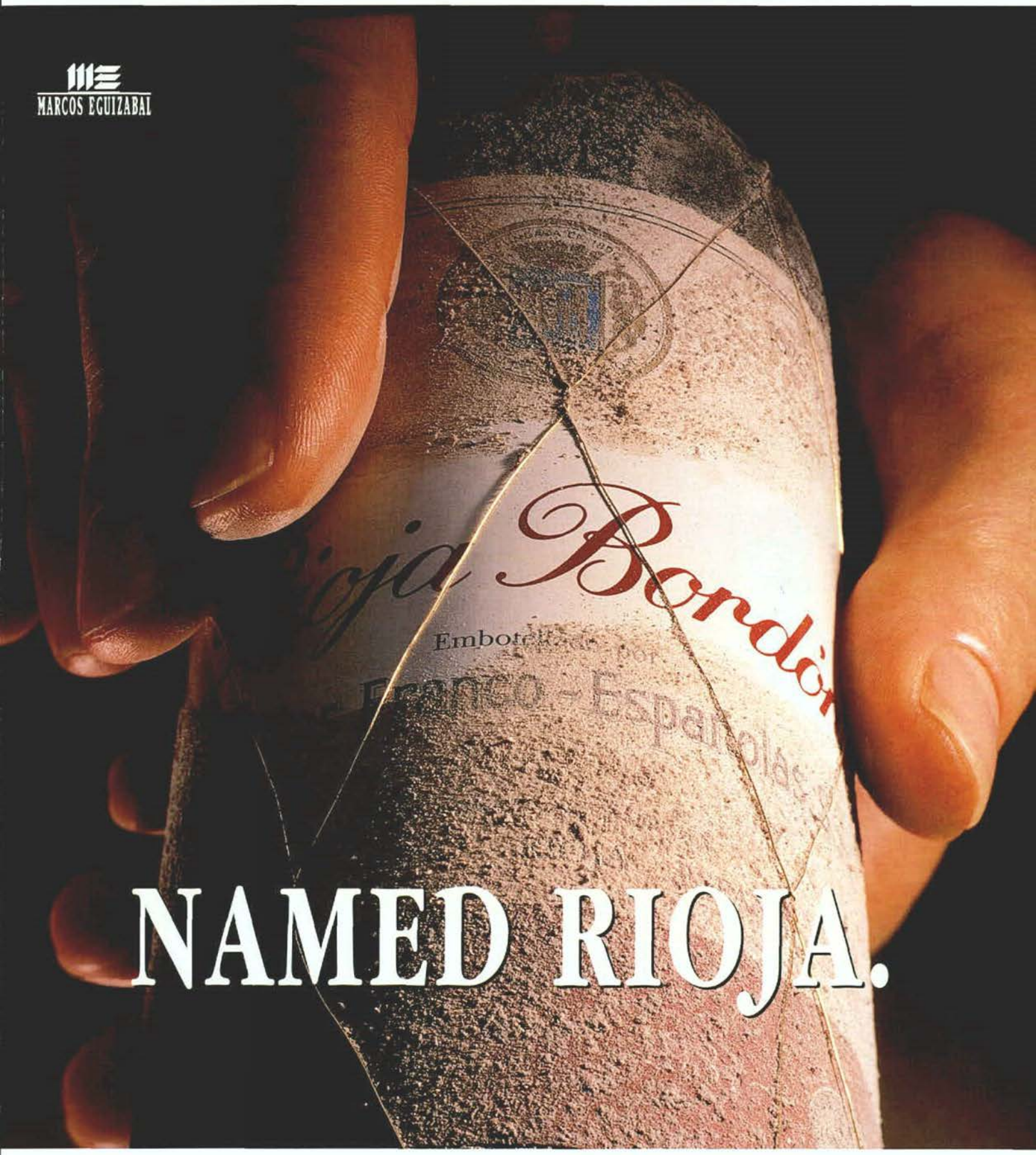

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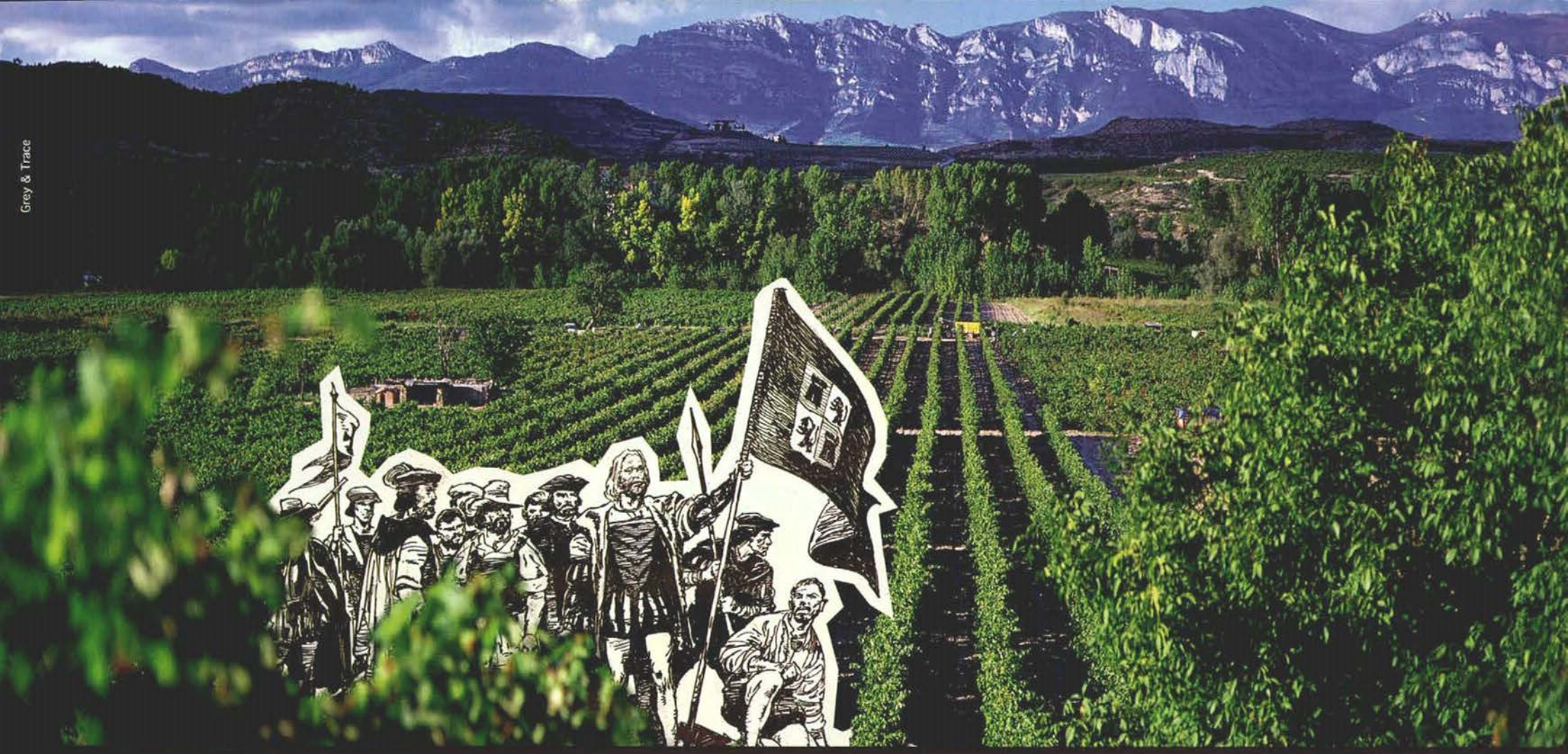

Nothing ever happens in Rioja, not even the discovery of America, as random as it was.

It's been over five hundred years since Christopher Columbus came back with the news. It would change the face of Old Europe forever, but it did not keep those of us in Rioja from continuing our work. This privileged region in the North of Spain has been making wine for over 2000 years. The climate, the earth, and the local grape (Tempranillo) seem to have been created for the sole purpose of producing some of the best wines in the world. It's not that we live in isolation. It's just that in our world the most important things have to do with the harvesting of grapes and the aging and bottling of wine. Each bottle with the Rioja Qualified Denomination of Origin label comes from a place where all you hear is silence and nothing ever happens. Though we have to admit that Christopher's discovery did give us the best wood ever for aging wine: American oak.

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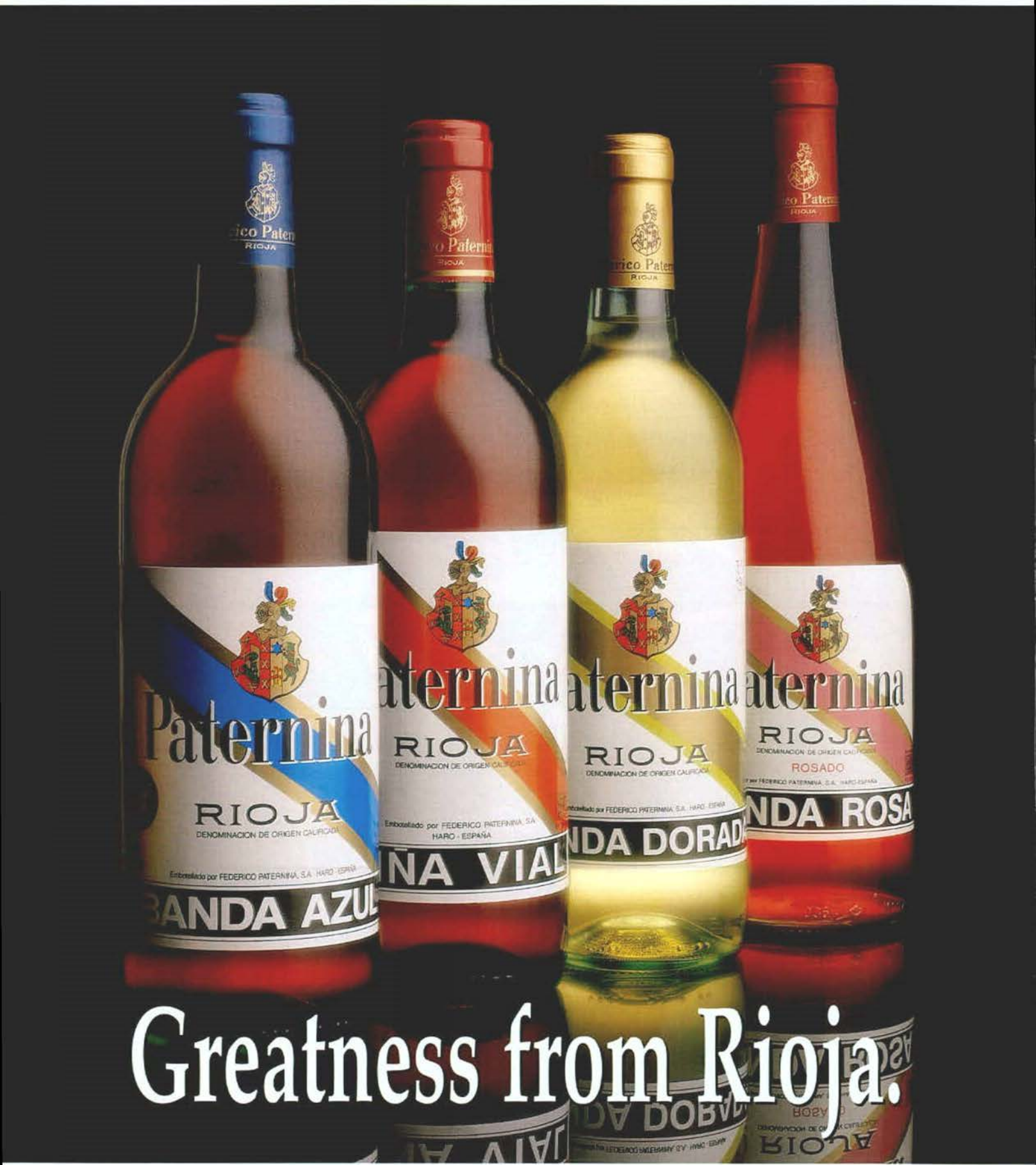

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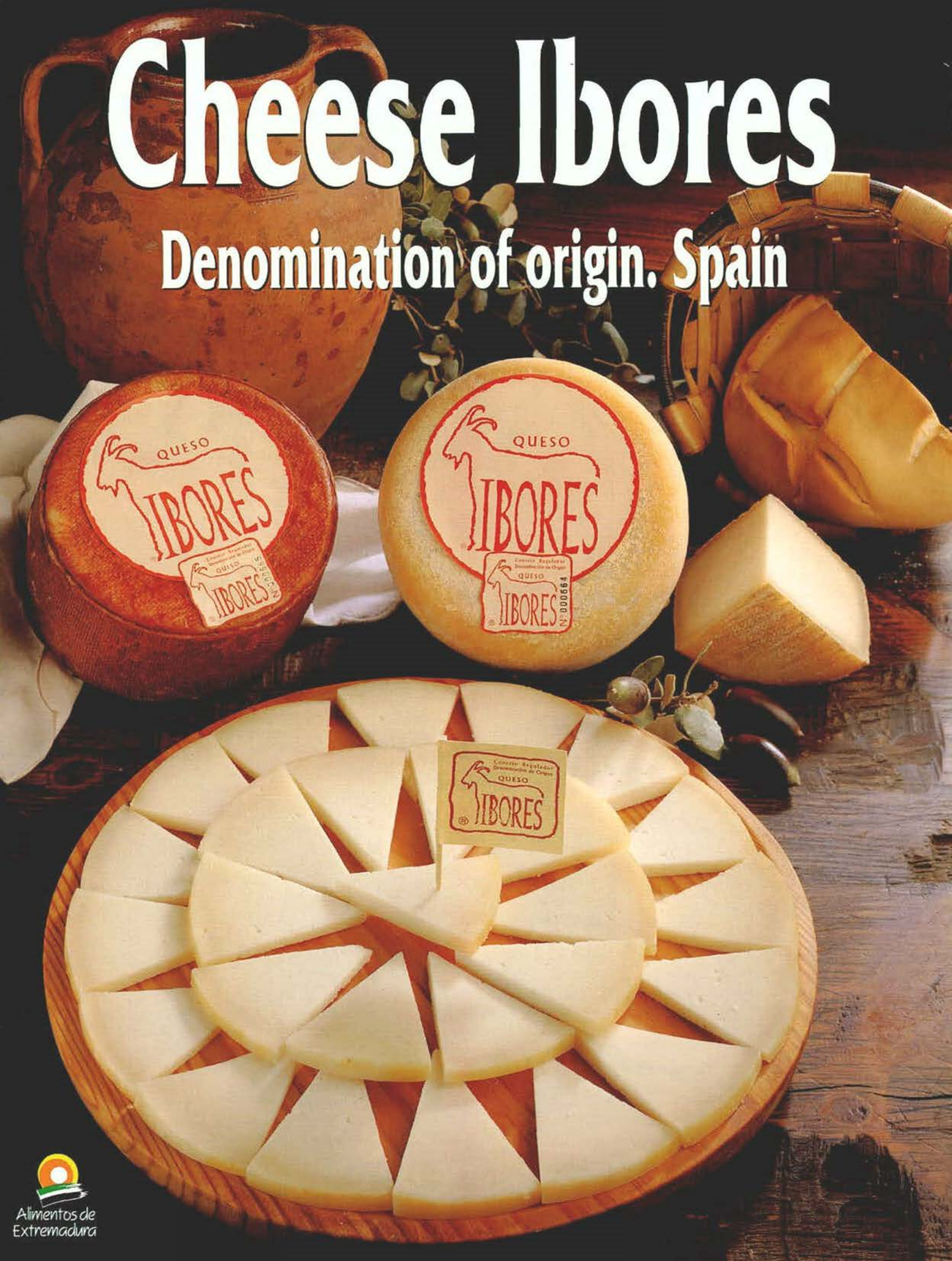

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GLOSSARY

Wine Aging Terms

Crianza. This term is reserved for wines aged in the wood and bottle for at least two years, six months of which must be in oak casks. (Note: In several regions the minimum time in cask is 12 months.)

Reserva. There are two types of standard for the use of this designation. Red wines must age for a minimum of 36 months in the wood and bottle, at least 12 of them in oak casks.

For rosé and white wines, the minimum period is 24 months, six of them in oak casks.

Gran Reserva. This term is used exclusively for red and claret wines that have aged for at least 24 months in oak casks followed by at least 36 months in the bottle. For white and rosé wines, the minimum period is 48 months of which a minimum of six months must be in the wood.

Notes:

1. Many Denominations insist that the oak casks must be no more than 225 liters, however, national legislation allows oak casks up to 1,000 liters.

2. Wines are often kept in vats for a few months prior to aging in casks, so the arithmetic varies for each one.

3. Many bodegas age their wines for more than the stipulated minimum periods.

Sherry

The aging system for sherry is the *solera* system, which is made up of a number of stages through which the younger wines pass, acquiring the characteristics of the older wines, thus ensuring the continuity of style. The butts (oak casks of 500 liters each) in the earlier stages are known as *criaderas*, and the last and oldest butts in the system are the solera stage from which the wine is taken for bottling. The solera stage is topped up from the next oldest stage (the first and oldest criadera) and that in turn is topped up from the next oldest. There is no stipulated number of stages, but four to six would be the average. No more than thirty percent of the wine may be removed from the solera in any one year.

Cava

This is the Denomination of Origin for sparkling wines produced by the traditional method, that is to say, that the secondary fermentation takes place in the same bottle in which it is sold. The *cava* demarcated region is in several zones, the most important of which is Catalonia. The others are Aragon, Navarre, La Rioja, Castile-León, Extremadura and Valencia. The Cava Denomination should not be confused with other denominations that might be associated with the provinces in which cava is produced. The minimum aging period for cava wines is nine months in the bottle, though many spend between 18 months and three years, and a few up to five years.

Denominación de Origen (D.O.)

Denomination of Origin is an official designation covering products whose raw materials are produced and manufactured within a specific geographical area, and which have distinctive qualities and characteristics due, mainly, to the natural environment, manufacture, and aging methods.

Denominación de Origen Calificada (D.O.Ca.)

A "Denominación de Origen Calificada" (D.O.Ca.) is a Denomination of Origin that fulfills the strictest requirements, among which should be highlighted the following:

The price of the grapes used in winemaking must be greater than 200% of the national average price.

Only wines bottled exclusively at the original wineries will be sold.

At least 90% of the vineyard dedicated to winemaking must be inscribed in the registry of Denomination vines; and in the registry of wineries, it must be stipulated that these carry out at least 90% of the wine production within the geographical unit.

Quality control of the vines must be carried out by the regulating council, batch by batch and with a volume less than or equal to 1000 hectoliters per batch.

At present, there are two D.O.Ca. for wine in Spain: the Rioja D.O.Ca. and the Priorato D.O.Ca.

Denominación Específica (D.E)

The Specific Denomination covers products characterized by a relation to their geographical setting, with the use of certain raw materials, a determined method of production and/or manufacture, but differs from a D.O. in that these three factors do not necessarily have to coincide.

D.E. corresponds to the P.G.I. (Protected Geographic Indication) on European level.

Each D.O. or D.E. is managed by a Consejo Regulador (C.R.) or regulating council, which sees to the enforcement of the regulations.

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Erratum
In the last issue of *Spain Gourmetour* No. 56, "Delicatessen Suite", on page 19, we wrongly published a photo of Lafayette Gourmet together with the text about la Grande Epicerie de Paris and viceversa.

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